Ἐν Ὀλίγῳ Χριστιανος.

Almost Christian Discovered:

OR

The False Professor

TRYED and CAST.

Being the Substance of Seven

SERMONS,

First Preached at *Sepulchers*, *London*, 1661. And now at the Importunity of Friends made Publick.

The Ninth Edition.

By *MATTHEW MEAD.*

Luke 16. 14. *And the Pharisees who were Covetous, heard all these things, and they derided him.*

Verse 15. *And Jesus said unto them, Ye are they which justifie your selves before Men; but God knoweth your Hearts: For that which is highly Esteemed amongst Men, is Abomination in the sight of God.*

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THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY SOCIETY

To the Congregation at *Sepulchres*, that were the Auditors of these Sermons;

Grace and Peace be multiplied.

Beloved,

WHat the meaning of that Providence was, that called me to the occupation of my Talent amongst you this Summer, will be best read and understood by the Effects of it upon your own Souls: The kindly increase of Grace and Holiness in heart and life, can only prove it to have been in mercy: where this is not the fruit of the Word, there it becomes a Judgment. The World travels with life or death, salvation or damnation, and bringeth forth one or another in every soul that hears it; I would not for a World (were it in my power to make the choice) that my labours, which were meant and designed for the promotion of your immortal souls, to the glory of the other World, in a present pursuance of the things of your peace, should be found to have been a ministration of Death and Condemnation in the great day of Jesus Christ. Yet this (the Lord knoweth) is the too common effect of the most plain and powerful preaching of the Gospel. The waters of the Sanctuary do not always heal where they come; for there are miry and marish places that shall be given to Salt, למלחת כחבן: The same word (למח) is elsewhere in Scripture rendered barrenness; he turneth a fruitful Land למלחה into barrenness,

Ezek. 47. 11.

Ps. 107. 34.

rennes, *so that the Judgment denounced upon these miry and marish places, is that the* curse of barrenness *shall rest upon them, notwithstanding the* waters of the Sanctuary *overflow them.*

It is sad, but certain that the Gospel inflicteth a death of its own, as well as the Law, or else

Jude 12. *how are those Trees in* Jude *said to be δὶς ἀποθανόντα,* twice dead, and plucked up by the roots? *Yea, that which in it self is the greatest mercy, through the interposition of mens lusts, and the efficacy of this cursed seed of unbelief, turneth to the greatest Judgment, as the richest and most*

Rom. 5. 8. John 3. 16. *generous Wine makes the sharpest Vinegar. Our Lord Christ himself, the choicest mercy that the Bowels of a God could bless a perishing World withal; whose coming (himself bearing witness) was no less Errand than that of Eternal Life and Blessedness to the lost and cursed Sons of* Adam: *Yet to how many was he* אבן נגף רצור

John 10. 10. Isa. 2. 14. מב סלול, a stone of stumbling and a Rock of offence; *yea,* a gin, and a snare, *and that to both the Houses of* Israel, *the only professing people of God at that day in the World? And is he not a stone of stumbling in the Ministry of the Gospel to many Professors to this very day, upon which they fall and are broken? When he saith,* Blessed is he whosoever shall not be offended in me; *he doth therein plainly suppose, that both in his Person and Doctrine the generality of men would be offended in him.*

Not that this is the design of Christ and the Gospel, but it comes so to pass through the corruptions of the hearts of men, whereby they make light of Christ, and stand out against that Life and Grace which the Lord Jesus by his blood so dearly purchased, and is by the preaching of the Gospel so freely tendered; the wilful refusal whereof will as surely double our damnation, as the acceptance thereof will secure our eternal salvation.

Oh consider it is a thing of the most serious concernment in the world, how we carry our selves under the Gospel, and with what dispositions and affections of Heart and Soul seasons of Grace are entertained; this being taken into the consideration to make it weight, that we are the nearer to Heaven or to Hell, to Salvation or Damnation by every Ordinance we sit under: Boast not therefore of priviledges enjoyed, with neglect of the important duties thereby required. Remember Capernaums *case and tremble: As many go to Heaven by the very Gates of Hell, so more go to Hell by the Gates of Heaven, in that the number of them that profess Christ, is greater than the number of them that truly close with Christ.* Mat. 11. 13.

Beloved, I know the Preaching of the Gospel hath proselyted many of you into a Profession; but I fear that but few of you are brought by it to a true close with the Lord Christ for Salvation. (I beseech you bear with my jealousie, for it is the fruit of a tender love to your precious Souls.) Most men are good Christians in the verdict of their opinion; but you know the Law alloweth no man to be a witness in his own case, because their affection usually out acteth Conscience, and self-love balketh truth for its own interest.

The Heart of Man is the greatest Impostor and Cheat in the world; God himself adjusts it, Jer. 17. 9. The heart is deceitful above all things. *Some of the deceits thereof you will find discovered in this* Treatise, *which sheweth you, that every Grace hath its counterfeit, and that the highest Profession may be where true Conversion is not.*

הלב מנלעק

Supplantatium cor ira omni.

The design hereof is not to break the bruised Reed, nor to quench the smoaking Flax: *Not to discourage the weakest Believer, but to awaken formal Professors. I would not sad the hearts of any,* whom God would not have made sad; *though I know it is hard to rip up the dangerous*

estate and condition of a professing Hypocrite, but that the weak Christian will think himself concerned in the discovery. And therefore as I preached a Sermon on Sincerity among you, for the support and encouragement of such, at the end of this; so I did purpose to have printed it with this. But who can be Master of his own purposes, that is, as I am, under such daily variety of Providences? your kindly acceptation of this, will make me a debtor for that.

The Dedication hereof belongs to you on a double account, for as it had not been preached, but that love to your Souls caused it; so it had much less been printed, but that your importunate desire procured it; And therefore what entertainment soever it findeth in the World, yet I hope I may expect you will welcome it, especially considering it was born under your Roof, and therefore hopes to find favour in your Eyes, and room in your Hearts.

Accept it I beseech you, as a publick acknowledgement of the Engagements which your great, (and I think I may say) unparallel'd Respects have laid me under, which I cannot way compensate, but by my prayers; and if you will take them for satisfaction, I do promise to be your Remembrancer at the Throne of Grace, whilst I am,

Matthew Mead.

To

To the Reader.

Reader,

I Know how customary it is for men to ascend the publick Stage, with premised Apologies for the weakness and unworthiness of their Labours, which is an argument that their desires (either for the sake of others profit, or their own credit, or both) are stretched beyond the tedder of their abilities; and that they covet to commend themselves to the Worlds censure, in a better dress than common infirmity will allow; for my own part, I may truly say with *Gideon*, *Behold my thousand is the meanest*, (my Talent is the smallest) *and I am the least in my Fathers house*; and therefore this appearance in publick is not the fruit of my own choice, which would rather have been in some other subject, wherein I stand in some sense indebted to the World; or else in somewhat more digested, and possibly better fitted for common acceptation; but this is but to consult the interest of a mans own name, which in matters of this concern, is no better than a *sowing to the flesh*, and the harvest of such a Seed-time will be *in corruption*.

אלפי הרל

Judg. 6. 15.

Gal. 6. 8.

Thou hast here one of the saddest considerations imaginable presented to thee, and that is, How far it is possible a man may go in a Profession of Religion, and yet after all fall short of Salvation: How far he may run, and yet not *so run as to obtain*: This, I say, is sad, but not so sad as true; for our Lord Christ doth plainly attest it; *Strive to enter in at the strait gate, for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able.*

1 Cor. 9. 14

Luke 13. 24.

My design herein is, that the formal, sleepy

Profeſſor may be awakened, and the cloſe Hypocrite diſcovered; but my fear is, that weak Believers may be hereby diſcouraged; for as it is hard to ſhew how low a Child of God may fall into ſin, and yet have true grace, but that the ſinner will be apt thereupon to preſume; ſo it is as hard to ſhew how high an Hypocrite may riſe in a Profeſſion, and yet have no grace, but that the Believer will be apt thereupon to deſpond. The prevention whereof I have carefully endeavoured, by ſhewing, that though a man may go thus far, and yet be but *almoſt a Chriſtian*; yet a man may fall ſhort of this, and be a true *Chriſtian* notwithſtanding; judge not therefore thy ſtate by any one *Character* thou findeſt laid down of a Falſe Profeſſor, but read the whole, and then make a judgment: For I have cared, as not to give *Childrens bread to Dogs*, ſo not to uſe the *Dogs whip* to ſcare the *Children*; yet I could wiſh, that this *Book* might fall into the hands of ſuch only whom it chiefly concerns, who *have a name to live, and yet are dead*; being buſie with the *form of Godlineſs*, but ſtrangers to the *power of it*. Theſe are the proper ſubjects of this Treatiſe: And the Lord follow it with his bleſſing where ever it comes, that it may be an awakening word to all ſuch, and eſpecially to that generation of profligate Profeſſors (with which this Age abounds) who, if they keep to their Church, bow the knee, talk out a few prayers, and at a good time receive the *Sacrament*, think they do enough for Heaven, and hereupon judge their condition ſafe, and their Salvation ſure; though there be a Hell of ſin in their hearts, *and the poiſon of Aſps is under our lips*, their minds being as yet carnal and unconverted, and

Mat. 17. 26.

Rev. 3. 11.
2 Tim. 3. 5.

Rom. 3. 13.

and their Converſations filthy and unſanctified: If Eternal life he of ſo eaſie attainment, and to be had at ſo cheap a rate, why did our *Lord Chriſt* tell us, *Strait is the gate, and narrow is the way which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.* Mat. 7. 14. And why ſhould the Apoſtle perplex us with ſuch a needleſs injunction, *To give diligence to make our Calling and Election ſure?* 2 Pet. 1. 10. certainly therefore it is no ſuch eaſie thing to be ſaved, as many make it; and that thou wilt ſee plainly in the following Diſcourſe: I have been ſomewhat ſhort in the application of it; and therefore let me here be thy Remembrancer in five important duties.

Firſt, *Take heed of reſting in a form of Godlineſs*, as if Duties *ex opere operato* could confer grace; a lifeleſs formality is advanced to a very high eſteem in the world, as a *Kab of Doves dung* was ſold in the famine of *Samaria* 2 Kings 6. 25. at a very dear rate. Alas! the profeſſion of Godlineſs is but a ſandy foundation to build the hope of an immortal Soul upon for Eternity; remember, the Lord Jeſus Chriſt called him a fooliſh builder, *that founded his houſe upon the ſand*, Mat. 7. 26. and the ſad event proved him ſo, *for it fell, and great was the fall of it*; Verſe 27. Oh therefore lay thy foundation by Faith upon the Rock Chriſt Jeſus; look to Chriſt through all, and reſt upon Chriſt, in all. 1 Cor. 3. 12.

Secondly, *Labour to ſee an excellency in the power of Godlineſs*, a Beauty in the life of Chriſt; If the means of grace have a lovelineſs in them, ſurely grace it ſelf hath much more; for *finis dat amabilitatem mediis*, the goodneſs of its means lies in its ſuitableneſs and ſerviceableneſs to the end; the form of godlineſs hath no goodneſs in it, any farther than it ſteads and becomes uſeful to the Soul

n the Power and practice of Godlineſs. The life of Holineſs is the only excellent life, it is the life of Saints and Angels in Heaven; yea, it is the life of God in himſelf. As it is a great proof of the baſeneſs and filthineſs of Sin, that ſinners ſeek to cover it; ſo it is a great proof of the excellency of godlineſs, that ſo many pretend to it; The very Hypocrites fair profeſſion pleads the Cauſe of Religion, although the Hypocrite is then really worſt, when he is ſeemingly beſt.

Malus ubi bonum ſe ſimulat, nunc eſt peſſimus.

Thirdly, *Look upon things to come as the greateſt realities*; for *non entis & non apparentis idem eſt affectus*; things that are not believed, work no more upon the affections than if they had no being; and this is the grand reaſon why the generality of Men ſuffer their affections to lacquy after the world, ſetting the Creature in the place of God in their hearts.

Moſt men judge of the reality of things by their viſibility and proximity to Sence; and therefore the choice of that wretched Cardinal becomes their Option, who would not leave his part in *Paris*, for his part in *Paradiſe*: ſure whatever his intereſt might be in the former, he had little enough in the latter: Well may covetouſneſs be called Idolatry, when it thus chooſes the World for its God.

Col. 3. 5.

Mat. 9. 44.

Oh! conſider, Eternity is no dream; Hell and the Worm that never dies, is no melancholy conceit. Heaven is no feigned *Elyſium*: There is the greateſt reality imaginable in theſe things; though they are ſpiritual, and out of the ken of ſenſe, yet they are real, and within the view of faith! *Look not therefore at the things which are ſeen, but look at the things which are not ſeen; for the things*

2 Cor. 4. 18.

that

that are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen, are eternal.

Fourthly, *Set a high rate upon thy Soul*; what we lightly prize, we easily part with; many men sell their Souls (at the rate of prophane *Esaus* birth-right) *for a morsel of Bread*, nay *for that which* in the sense of the Holy Ghost *is not bread.* O consider, thy Soul is the most precious and invaluable Jewel in the world, it is σοφοῦ τέκτονος καλὸν ποίκιλμα, the most beautiful piece of Gods workmanship in the whole Creation; it is that which bears the Image of God, and which was bought with the blood of the Son of God; and shall we not set a value upon it, and count it precious.

Heb. 12. 16.

Isa. 55 2.

1 Pet. 1. 18, 19.

The Apostle *Peter* speaks of three very precious things.

A Precious Christ, 2 Pet. 1. 7.
Precious Promises, 2 Pet. 1. 4.
And Precious Faith. and 1. 1.

Now the *preciousness* of all these lies in their usefulness to the Soul, Christ is *precious*, as being the Redeemer of precious Souls: the Promises are *precious*, as making over this *precious Christ* to *precious Souls*. *Faith is precious*, as bringing a *precious Soul* to close with a *precious Christ*, as he is held forth in the *precious Promises*. Oh take heed that thou art not found *over-valuing* other things, and *undervaluing* thy Soul, shall thy flesh, nay, thy Beast be loved, and shall thy Soul be slighted? Wilt thou cloath and pamper thy Body, and yet take no care of thy Soul? this is as if a man should feed his Dog, and starve his Child? *Meats for the belly, and the belly for Meats, but God shall destroy both it and them.* Oh let not a tottering perishing carkass have all your time and care, as if the Life and Salvation

1 Cor. 6. 13.

tion of thy Soul were not worth the while.

Lastly, *Meditate much of the strictness and suddenness of that Judgment-day, which thou and I must pass through into an everlasting state*, wherein God the impartial Judge will require an account at our hands, of all our Talents and Betrustments; we must then account for Time, how we have spent that; for Estate, how we have imployed that; for Strength, how we have laid out that; for Afflictions and Mercies, how they have been Improved; for the Relations we stood in here, how they have been discharged; and for seasons and means of Grace, how they have been husbanded; and look how *we have sowed here, we shall reap hereafter.*

Gal. 6. 7.

Reader, These are things that of all other deserve most of, and call loudest for our utmost care and endeavour, though by the most least minded: To consider what a spirit of Atheism (if we may judge the tree by the fruits, and the Principle by the practice) the hearts of most men are filled with, who live, as if God were not to be served, nor Christ to be sought, nor lust to be mortified, nor self to be denyed, nor the Scripture to be believed, nor the Judgment-day to be minded, nor Hell to be feared, nor Heaven to be desired, nor the Soul to be valued; but give up themselves to a worse than brutish sensuality, *to work all uncleanness with greediness*, living without God in the World: This is a meditation fit enough to break our hearts, if at least we were of holy *Davids* temper, who *beheld the transgressors and was grieved*, and had *Rivers of waters running down his eyes, because men kept not Gods Laws.* The prevention and correction of this Soul-destroying Distemper, is not the least de-

Mat. 7. 19, 20.

Eph. 4. 19. & 2. 12.

Psal. 119. 158, Verse 136.

sign

ſign of this Treatiſe now put into thy hand: though the chief virtue of this Receit lies in its Soveraign uſe to aſſwage and cure the ſwelling Tympany of Hypocriſie; yet it may ſerve alſo (with Gods Bleſſing) as a Plaiſter for the Plague ſore of Prophaneneſs, if timely applyed by ſerious Meditation, and carefully kept on by conſtant Prayer.

Reader, Expect nothing of curioſity or quaintneſs, for then I ſhall deceive thee; but if thou wouldſt have a *touch-ſtone* for the trial of thy ſtate, poſſibly this may ſtead thee. If thou art either a ſtranger to a profeſſion, or an Hypocrite under a profeſſion, then read and tremble, for thou art the man here pointed at.

——— *Mutato nomine de te* Horat.
Fabula narratur. ———

But if the Kingdom of God be come with power into thy Soul; if Chriſt be formed in thee; if thy heart be upright and ſincere with God, then read and rejoyce. Mark 9. 1 Luke 17. 21.

I fear I have tranſgreſſed the bounds of an Epiſtle; the Mighty God, whoſe Prerogative it is to teach to profit, whether by the tongue, or the pen, by ſpeaking, or writing, bleſs this Tract, that it may be to thee as a Cloud of Rain to the dry ground, dropping fatneſs to thy Soul, that ſo thy Fleece being watered with the *dew of Heaven*, thou mayeſt *grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour, Jeſus Chriſt.* In whom I am thy Isa. 48. 17. 2 Pet. 3. 18.

Friend and Servant,

London Octob. 29. 1661.

Mat. Mead.

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ACTS

ACTS XXVI. 28.

—Ἐν ὀλίγῳ με πείθεις χριστιανὸν ποιῆσαι.

——*Almoſt thou perſwadeſt me to be a Chriſtian.*

IN this Chapter you have the Apoſtle *Paul*'s Apology, and defenſative Plea, which he makes for himſelf againſt thoſe blind *Jews* which did ſo maliciouſly proſecute him before *Agrippa*, *Feſtus*, *Bernice*, and the Council.

In which Plea he doth chiefly inſiſt upon three things:

The manner of his Life before Converſion.

The manner of his Converſion.

The manner of his Life after Converſion.

How he lived before Converſion, he tells you from *verſe* 4. to 13.

How God wrought on him to Converſion, he tells you from *verſe* 13. to 18.

How he lived after Converſion, he tells you from *verſe* 19. to 23.

Before Converſion he was very Phariſaical.

The manner of his converſion was very wonderful.

The fruit of his converſion was very remarkable.

Before converſion he perſecuted the Goſpel which others preached: after converſion he preached the Goſpel which himſelf had perſecuted.

While

While he was a Persecutor of the Gospel, the *Jews* loved him; but now that (by the Grace of God) he was become a Preacher
Verse 21. of the Gospel, now the *Jews* hate him, and sought to kill him.

He was once against Christ, and then many were for him; but now that he was for Christ, all were against him; his being an
Verse 9. enemy to Jesus, made others his friends; but when he came to own Jesus, then they became his enemies.

And this was the great charge they had against him, that of a great Opposer, he was become a great Professor.

Hic vir invidit mihi gratiam Christi. Because God had changed him, therefore this enraged them: As if they would be the worse, because God had made him better. God had wrought on him by Grace, and they seem to envy him the Grace of God.

He preached no Treason, nor sowed no Sedition; only he preached Repentance, and Faith in Christ, and the Resurrection, and for this he was called in question.

This is the Breviate and Sum of *Pauls* defence and plea for himself, which you find in the sequel of the Chapter had a different effect upon his Judges.

Festus seems to censure him, *ver.* 24.

Agrippa seems to be convinced by him, *ver.* 28.

The whole Bench seems to acquit him, *ver.* 30, 31.

Festus he thinks *Paul* was beside himself.

Agrippa he is almost perswaded to be such a one as himself.

Dei sapientia mundo est insania. Malc. in loc. *Festus* thinks him mad, because he did not understand the Doctrine of Christ, and the Resurrection: *Much Learning hath made thee mad.*

Agrippa

Agrippa he is so affected with his Plea, that he is almost wrought into his Principle: *Paul* pleads so effectually for his Religion, that *Agrippa* seems to be upon the turning-point to his Profession.

Putat hominem esse fanaticum. Mer. in loc.

Then Agrippa *said to* Paul, *Almost thou perswadest me to be a Christian.*

Almost] ἐν ὀλίγῳ, so the Greek; the words make some debate among the Learned. I shall not trouble you with the various hints upon them by *Valla*, *Simplicius*, *Beza*, *Erasmus* and others. I take the words as we read them, and they shew what an efficacy *Paul*'s Doctrine had upon *Agrippa*'s Conscience. Though he would not be Converted, yet he could not but be convinced; his Conscience was touched, though his Heart was not renewed.

Observat.

There is that in Religion, which carries its own evidence along with it, even to the Conscience of ungodly men?

Thou perswadest me] πείθεις, the word is from the Hebrew פתה, and it signifies both *suadere* and *persuadere*, either to use arguments to prevail, or to prevail by the arguments used.

Suadere est conantis, persuadere est efficientis. Beza,

Now it is to be taken in the latter sense here, to shew the influence of *Sauls* argument upon *Agrippa*, which had almost proselyted him to the profession of Christianity.

Suadet qui consulit, persuadet, qui quo vult, inducit hominem, Eras.

Almost thou perswadest me to be a Christian

A Christian] χριστιανὸν γενέσθαι.

I hope I need not tell you what a Christian is, though I am perswaded many that are called *Christians*, do not know what a Christian is, or if they do, yet they don't know what it is to be a Christian.

A Christian is a Disciple of Jesus Christ; one that believes in and follows Christ. As one that embraces the Doctrine of *Arminius* is called an *Arminian*; and as he that owns the Doctrine and way of *Luther*, is called a *Lutherian*; so he that embraces, and owns, and follows the Doctrine of Jesus Christ, he is called a Christian.

The Word is taken more largely, and more strictly; more largely, and so all that profess Christ come in the flesh, are called Christians, in opposition to *Heathens* that do not know Christ; and to the poor blind *Jews*, that will not own Christ; and to the *Mahometan*, that prefers *Mahomet* above Christ.

But now in Scripture the word is of a more strict and narrow acceptation, it is used only to denominate the true Disciples and followers of Christ, *Acts* 11. 26. *The Disciples were first called Christians at* Antioch, 1 *Pet.* 4. 16. *If any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed*, that is, as a Member, and Disciple of Christ, and so in the Text, *Almost thou perswadest me to be a Christian.*

The word is used but in these three places (as I find) in all the New Testament, and in each of them it signifies in the sense aforementioned.

Fulk. *Not. on Rhem. Test.* The *Italians* make the name to be a name of reproach among them, and do usually abuse the word Christian to signifie a fool.

1 Cor. 1. 18. But if, as the Apostle saith, *the Preaching of Christ* is to the World *foolishness*, then it is no wonder that the Disciples of Christ are to the world *fools*.

1 Tim. 3. 16. Yet it is true (in a sound sense) that so they are. For the whole of Godliness is a Mystery.

A man must *die*, that would *live*; he must be

be *empty*, that would be *full*; he muſt be *loſt*, that would be *found*; he muſt *have nothing*, that would *have all things*; he muſt be *blind* that would have *Illumination*; he muſt be *condemned* that would have *Redemption*; ſo he muſt be a *Fool* that would be a *Chriſtian*. *If any Man among you ſeems to be wiſe, let him become a Fool, that he may be wiſe.* 1 Cor. 4. 10.

He is the true Chriſtian, that is the Worlds Fool, but wiſe to Salvation.

Thus you have the ſenſe and meaning of the Words briefly explained.

The Text needs no diviſion, and yet it is pity the *almoſt* ſhould not be divided from *Chriſtian*.

Though it is of little avail to divide them as they are linked in the Text, unleſs I could divide them as they are united in your Hearts; this would be a bleſſed diviſion, if the *almoſt* might be taken from the *Chriſtian*; That ſo you may not be only ἐν ὀλιγῳ but ἐν πολλῳ not only *propemodum*, but *admodum*, not only *almoſt*, but altogether *Chriſtians*.

This is Gods work to effect it; but it is our Duty to perſwade to it, and O that God would help me to manage this Subject ſo, that you may ſay in the concluſion, Thou perſwadeſt me (not almoſt, but) altogether to be a Chriſtian.

The Obſervation that I ſhall propound to handle, is this:

There are very many in the World, that are almoſt, and yet but almoſt Chriſtians; many that are near Heaven, and yet are ne're the nearer; many that are within a little of Salvation, and yet ſhall never enjoy the leaſt Salvation; they are within ſight of Heaven, and yet ſhall never have a ſight of God. Doct.

There are two ſad expreſſions in Scripture,

which I cannot but take notice of in this place.

The one is concerning the truly Righteous,
The other is concerning the seemingly Righteous.

It is said of the truely righteous, He shall *scarcely be saved*; and it is said of the seemingly righteous, He shall be *almost saved*: *Thou art not far from the Kingdom of God*, Mark 12. 24.

Μόλις σώζεται, 1 Pet. 4. 18.

The Righteous shall be saved with a *scarcely*, that is, through much difficulty; he shall go to Heaven through many sad fears of Hell.

Quod vix fit fit; quod fere fit, non fit.

The Hypocrite shall be saved with an *almost*; that is, he shall go to Hell through many fair hopes of Heaven.

There are two things arise from hence of very serious Meditation.

The one is, how oft a Believer may miscarry, how low he may fall and yet have true Grace.

The other is, how far an Hypocrite may go in the way to *Heaven*, how *high* he may attain, and yet have no Grace.

The Saint may be cast down very near to Hell, and yet shall never come there; and the Hypocrite may be lifted up very near to Heaven, and yet never come there.

The Saint may almost perish, and yet be saved eternally; the Hypocrite may almost be saved, and yet perish finally.

For the Saint at worst is really a Believer, and the Hypocrite at best is really a Sinner.

Before I handle the *Doctrine*, I must premise three things, which are of great use for the establishing of weak Believers, that they may not be shaken and discouraged by this Doctrine.

First,

First, There is nothing in the Doctrine that should be matter of stumbling or discouragement to weak Christians.

The Gospel doth not speak these things to wound Believers; but to awaken Sinners and formal Professors.

As there are none more averse than weak Believers, to apply the Promises and Comforts of the Gospel to themselves, for whom they are properly designed: So there are none more ready than they to apply the threats and severest things of the Word to themselves, for whom they were never intended.

As the Disciples, when Christ told them, *One of you shall betray me*, they that were innocent suspected themselves most, and therefore cry out, *Master is it I?* Mat. 26. 16.

So weak Christians when they hear Sinners reproved, or the Hypocrite laid open in the Ministry of the Word, they presently cry out, *Is it I?*

It is the Hypocrites fault to sit under the tryals and discoveries of the Word, and yet not to mind them:

And it is the weak Christians fault to draw sad conclusions of their own state from premises which nothing concerns them.

There is indeed great use of such Doctrine as this is, to all Believers.

1. To make them look to their standing, upon what bottom they are, and to see that the foundation of their hope be well laid, that they build not upon the Sand, but upon a Rock. Mat. 7. 24, 26.

2. It helps to raise our admiration of the distinguishing love of God, in bringing us into the way everlasting, when so many perish from the way; and in over-powering our Psal 139. 24.

Souls into a true conversion, when so many take up with a graceless profession.

1 Cor. 13. 5. 3 It incites to that excellent duty of heart-searching that so we approve our selves to God in sincerity.

4. It engages the Soul in double diligence, that it may be found not only believing, but persevering in Faith to the end.

These duties (and such as these are) make this Doctrine of use to all Believers; but they ought not to make use of it as a stumbling-block in the way of their peace and comfort.

My design in Preaching on this Subject, is not to make sad the Souls of those whom Christ will not have made sad; I would Mat. 12. 20. bring water, not to *quench the Flax that is smoaking*, but to put out that false fire that is of the Sinners *own kindling*, lest walking all his days by the light thereof, he shall at last Isa. 50. 1. *lye down in sorrow.*

My aim is to level the Mountain of the sinners Confidence not to weaken the hand of the Believers Faith and dependance; to awaken and bring in secure formal sinners, not to discourage weak Believers.

Secondly, I would premise this; though many may go far (very far) in the way to Heaven, and yet fall short; yet that soul that hath the least true grace, shall never fall Job 7 9. short. *The Righteous shall hold on his way.*

Though some may do very much in a way of duty (as I shall shew hereafter) and yet miscarry; yet that soul that doth duty with the least sincerity, shall never miscarry. *For he saveth the upright in heart.*

The least measure of true Grace is as saving as the greatest; it saves as surely, though not so comfortably. The least Grace gives a full

full Interest in the Blood of Christ, whereby we are throughly purged; and it gives a full Interest in the strength and power of Christ, whereby we shall be certainly preserved.

Christ keeps Faith in the soul, and Faith keeps the soul in Christ; and so *we are kept by the Power of God, through Faith to Salvation.* 1 Pet. 1. 5.

Thirdly, I would premise this, They that can hear such truths as this, without serious reflection, and self-examination, I must suspect the goodness of their condition.

You'll suspect that man to be next door to a Bankrupt, that never casts up his shop, nor looks over his Books; and I as verily think that man an Hypocrite, that never searches nor deals with his own Heart.

He that goes on in a road of Duties without any rub or doubting of his state, I doubt no man's State more than his.

When we see a man sick, and yet not sensible, we conclude the tokens of Death are upon him.

So when Sinners have no sense of their spiritual condition, it is plain that they are dead in sin; the tokens of Eternal Death are upon them.

These things being premised (which I desire you would carry along in your mind, while we travel through this Subject) I come to speak to the Proposition more distinctly and closely.

That there are very many in the World that are almost, and yet but almost Christians. Doct.

I shall demonstrate the truth of the Proposition, and then proceed to a more distinct Prosecution.

1. I shall demonstrate the truth of the Proposition; and I shall do it by Scripture-

ture evidence, which speaks plain, and fully to the case.

1. The young man in the Gospel is an eminent proof of this Truth, in *Mat.* 19. 16, to 23. There you read of one that came to Christ to learn of him the way to Heaven;

Verse 16. *Good Master, what good thing shall I do, that I may have Eternal Life?*

Verse 17. Our Lord Christ tells him, *If thou wilt enter into life, keep the Commandments*; and when Christ tells him which, he answers.

Verse. 20. *Lord, all these have I kept from my youth up; what lack I yet?*

Now do but see how far this man went.

1. *He obeyed.*] He did not only hear the Commands of God, but he kept them; now

Luke 11. 8. the Scripture saith, *Blessed is he that hears the word of God, and keeps it.*

2. *He obeyed universally*;] not this or that command, but both this, and that; he did not halve it with God, or pick and chuse which were easiest to be done, and leave the rest: No, but he obeys all; *All these things have I kept.*

3. *He obeyed constantly*; not in a fit of zeal only, but in a continued Series of Duty; his

Hos. 6. 4. goodness was not (as *Ephraim's*) *like the morning dew that passes away*; no; *All these things have I kept from my youth up.*

4. *He professeth his desire to know and do more,*] *to perfect that which was lacking of his obedience*; and therefore he goes to Christ to instruct him in his Duty; *Master, what lack I yet?* Now would you not think this a good man? alas! how few go thus far?

And yet as far as he went, he went not far enough; *he was almost, and yet but almost a Christian*; for he was an unsound Hypocrite;

crite; he forsakes Christ at last, and cleaves to his Lust. Ver. 21.

This then is a full proof of the truth of the Doctrine.

A second proof of it, is that of the Parable of the Virgins, *Mat.* 25. 1. and so on.

See what a progress they make, how far they go in a Profession of Christ. Psal. 45. 11.

1. *They are called Virgins*] Now this is a Name given in the Scripture both in the Old Testament and the New, to the Saints of Christ, *Cant.* 1. 3. *The Virgins love thee*: So *Rev.* 14. 4. The one hundred, forty and four thousand that stood with the Lamb on Mount *Sion*, are called *Virgins*. They are called *Virgins*, because they are not defiled with the *corruptions that are in the world through lust*. 2 Cor. 11. 2, 3. 2 Pet. 1. 4.

Now these here seem to be of that sort, for they are called *Virgins*. *Mat* 25. 1.

2. *They take their Lamps*] That is, they make a profession of Christ. Verse 3.

3. *They had some kind of Oyl in their Lamps*] as appears, *ver.* 8. they had some Convictions, and some Faith; (though not the Faith of Gods Elect) to keep their Profession alive, to keep the Lamp burning. *Hi sunt non qualescunque animæ, sed tales quæ habent Catholicam fidem, & habere videntur bona opera in Ecclesia Dei.* Aug. de Ser. Dom. Ser. 13. Verse 1.

4. *They went*;] Their Profession was not an idle Profession, they did perform Duties, frequent Ordinances, and do many things Commanded; they make a Progress, *They went*.

5. *They went forth.*] They went, and outwent, they left many behind them; this speaks out their separation from the World.

6. *They went with the wise Virgins.*] They joyned themselves to those who had joyned themselves to the Lord, and were Companions of them that were the companions of Christ. Cant. 1. 7.

7 *They go forth to meet the Bridegroom.*] This speaks out their owning and seeking after Christ.

8. When they heard the cry of the Bride-
Verse 7. groom coming, *They arose and trimmed their Lamps* ; they Profess Christ more highly, hoping now to go in with the Bridegroom.

9. *They sought for true Grace.*] Now don't we say, the desires of Grace are Grace? and so they are, if true and timely, if sound and seasonable.

Why lo here a desire of Grace in these Virgins; *give us of your Oyl.*

It was a desire of true Grace, but it was not a true desire of Grace; it was not true, because not timely; unsound, as being unseasonable; it was too late.

Their folly was not in taking Oyl, when they took their Lamps; their time of seek-
Verse 8. ing Grace was when they came to Christ, it was to late too seek it when Christ came to them. They should have sought for that when they took up their Profession; it was too late to seek it at the coming of the Bridegroom.

Verse 10. And therefore *they were shut out*; and
Verse 11. though they cry for entrance, *Lord, Lord, open to us*; yet the Lord Christ tells them, *I*
Verse 12. *know you not.*

You see how far these Virgins go in a Profession of Jesus Christ, and how long they continue in it, even 'till the Bridegroom came; they go to the very doors of Heaven and there (like the *Sodomites*) perish with their Hands upon the very threshold of Glory.

They were *almost Christians*, and yet but *almost*; almost saved, and yet perish.

You that are Professors of the Gospel of Christ,

Christ, stand and tremble, if they that have gone beyond us, fall short of Heaven, what shall become of us, that fall short of them?

If they that are Virgins, that profess Christ, that have some Faith in their Profession (such as it is) that have some fruit in their Faith, that outstrip others, that seek Christ; that improve their Profession, and suit themselves to their Profession, nay, that seek Grace; if such as these be but *almost Christians*, Lord. what are we?

If these two Witnesses be not sufficient to prove the truth, and confirm the credit of the Proposition,

Take a third; and that shall be from the Old Testament, *Isa.* 58 2. See what God saith of that People; he gives them a very high Character for a choice People, one would think.

They seek me daily, they delight to know my ways, as a Nation that did Righteousness, and forsook not the Ordinance of their God; *they ask of me the Ordinances of Justice; they take delight in approaching to* God.

See how far these went; if God had not said they were rotten, and unsound, we should have took them for the *He goats before the Flock*, and ranked them among the Worthies. Pray observe; Jer. 50. 8.

1. *They seek God.*] Now this is the proper Character of a true Saint, to seek God. True Saints are called Seekers of God: *This is the Generation of them that seek him, that seek thy Face, O Jacob*, or, O God of *Jacob*. Psal. 24. 6.

Lo, here a Generation of them that seek God; and are not these the Saints of God? nay farther,

2. *They seek him daily.*] Here's diligence backed with continuance, יום יום, *day by day*, that is, every day, from day to day. They did not seek him by fits and girds, nor in a time of trouble and affliction only, as many do.

Lord, in trouble have they visited thee, they poured out a Prayer when thy chastening was upon them, Isa. 26. 16. Many, when God visits them, then they visit him, but not till then; when God poureth out his afflictions then they pour out their Supplications. This is Sea-mens Devotion; when the storms
Jon. 1. 5. have brought them to *their wits end, then they cry to the Lord in their trouble*, Psal. 107. 27, 28. Many never cry to God, till they are at their wits end; they never come to God for help, so long as they can help themselves.

But now these here, whom God speaks of, are more zealous in their *Devotion*; the others make a vertue of necessity, but these seem to make conscience of Duty; for, saith God, *They seek me daily.*

Sure this is (one would think) a note of Sincerity.

Job 27. 10. *Job* saith of the Hypocrite, *Will he always call upon God?* Surely no; but now this people call upon God always, *They seek him daily:* certainly these are no Hypocrites.

3. Saith God, *They delight to know my ways.* Sure this frees them from the suspicion of Hypocrisie; for *Job* 21. 14. *They say unto* God, *Depart from us, we desire not the knowledge of thy ways.*

4. They are *as a Nation that did Righteousness.*] Not only as a Nation that spake Righteousness, or knew Righteousness, or professed Righteousness, but as a Nation that did

did Righteousness, that practised nothing but what was just and right. They appeared to the Judgment of the World as good as the best.

5. *They forsook not the Ordinances of their God.*] They seem true to their Principles, constant to their Profession, better than many among us, that cast off Duties; and forsake the Ordinances of God; but these hold out in their Profession, *They forsook not the Ordinances of God.*

6. *They ask of me* (saith God) *the Ordinances of Justice.*] They will not make their own will the Rule of right and wrong, but the Law and Will of God; and therefore in all their dealings with men, they desire to be guided and counselled by God. *They ask of me the Ordinances of Justice.*

7. *They take delight in approaching to God.*] Sure this can't be the guize of an Hypocrite; *Will he delight himself in the Almighty?* (saith *Job*) No, he will not. Job 27. 10.

Though God is the chief delight of man, (having every thing in him to render him lovely, as was said of *Titus Vespatian*) yet the Hypocrite will not delight in God. *Delicia humani generis.*

Till the Affections are made spiritual, there is no affection to things that are spiritual. God is a spiritual good, and therefore Hypocrites cannot delight in God. But these are a People that delight in approaching to God. *Hypocrita neque Deum neque divina habet in deliciis.*

8. They were a People that were much in fasting, as you may see, *ver.* 3. *Wherefore have we fasted* (say they) *and thou seest not?* Now this is a Duty that doth not suppose and require truth of Grace only in the Heart, but strength of Grace.

No man (saith our Lord Christ) *puts new* Mat. 9. 17.

Wine

Wine into old bottles, lest the bottles break, and the Wine run out.

New Wine is strong, and old bottles weak; and the strong Wine breaks the weak Vessel: this is a reason Christ gives, why his Disciples who were newly converted (and but weak as yet) were not exercised with this austere Discipline.

Assemb. Annot. upon the place.

But this people here mentioned, were a people that *fasted* often, *afflicted their souls* much, wore themselves out by frequent Practices of Humiliation.

Sure therefore this was *new Wine in new bottles*; this must needs be a *people* strong in Grace; here seems to be Grace, not only in truth, but also in growth. And yet for all this they were no better than a Generation of Hypocrites; they made a goodly Progress, and went far, but yet they went not far enough; they were cast off by God after all. I hope by this time the truth of the Point is sufficiently avouched and confirmed; *That a man may be* (yea very many are) *almost, and yet* (no more than) *but almost Christians.*

Now for the more distinct Prosecution of the Point.

1. *I shall shew you step by step, how far a man may go, what attainments he may reach unto, how specious and singular a Progress he may make in Religion, and yet be but almost a Christian when all is done.*

2. *I will shew you whence it is, that many men go so far as that they are almost Christians.*

3. *Why they are but almost Christians when they have gone thus far.*

4. *What the reason is, why men that go thus far as to be almost Christians, yet go no farther than to be almost Christians.*

1. How

1. *How far may a man go in the way to Heaven, and yet be but almost a Christian?* Quest.

This I shall shew you in twenty several steps. Answ.

1. *A man may have much knowledge, much light; he may know much of God, and his will, much of Christ, and his ways*, and yet be but almost *a Christian.*

For though there can be no Grace without Knowledge, yet there may be much Knowledge where there is no Grace: Illumination often goes before, when Conversion never follows after. The Subject of Knowledge is the Understanding, the Subject of Holiness is the Will. Now a man may have his Understanding enlightened, and yet his Will not at all sanctified. He may have an Understanding to know God, and yet want a Will to obey God. The Apostle tells us of some, that *when they knew* God, *yet* Rom. 1. 21. *they glorified him not as* God.

To make a man altogether a Christian, there must be light in the *Head*, and heat in the *Heart*, knowledge in the *Understanding*, and zeal in the *Affections.*

Some have zeal and no knowledge, that is blind Devotion; some have knowledge and no zeal, that is fruitless Speculation; but where knowledge is joyned with zeal, that makes a true Christian.

But is it not said, *This is Life Eternal, to know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent?* Joh. 17. 3. Object.

It is not every knowledge of God and Christ that interests the Soul in Life Eternal. For why then do the Devils perish? they have more knowledge of God than all the men in the World; for though by their fall they lost their Holiness, yet they lost not their Knowledge. Answ.

They

They are called Δαίμονες from their Knowledge, and yet they are Διάβολοι from their Malice. Devils still.

Knowledge may fill the Head, but it will never better the Heart if there be not somewhat else. The *Pharisees* had much knowledge: *Behold, Thou art called a Jew, and restest in the Law, and makest thy boast of God, and knowest his will,* &c. and yet they were a Generation of Hypocrites.

Rom. 2. 17, 18.

Sinite Sapientes hujus mundi sapienter descendere ad Infernum.

Alas how many have gone loaded with knowledge to Hell?

Though it is true, that it is Life Eternal to know God and Jesus Christ, yet it is as true, that many do know God, and Jesus Christ, that shall never see Life Eternal.

There is, you must know, a twofold knowledge; the one is common, but not saving; the other is not common, but saving; common knowledge is that which floats in the Head, but doth not influence nor affect the Heart. This knowledge Reprobates may have: *Balaam saw* Christ *from the top of the Rocks, and from the Hills.*

Num. 23. 10.

Naturalists say, that there is a Pearl in the Toads Head, and yet her Belly is full of Poyson. The *French* have a Berry which they call *uve de spine*, the Grape of a Thorn.

The common knowledge of Christ is the pearl in the Toads-Head, The Grape that grows upon Thorns, it may be found in men unsanctified.

And then there is a saving Knowledge of God and Christ which doth include the assent of the mind, and the consent of the will, this is a Knowledge that implies faith; *By his Knowledge shall my Righteous Servant justifie many.*

Is. 53. 11.

And this is that Knowledge which leads

to

to Life Eternal: Now whatever that meaſure of Knowledge is, which a man may have of God, and of Jeſus Chriſt, yet if it be not this ſaving knowledge, knowledge joyned with affection and application, he is but almoſt a Chriſtian.

He only knows God aright, who knows how to obey him, and obey according to his knowledge of him; *A good underſtanding have all they that do his Commandments.* Pſal. 111. 10.

All knowledge without this makes a man but like *Nebuchadnezzars* Image, with a *head of Gold, and feet of Clay.*

Some know, but to know.

Some know, to be known.

Some know, to practiſe what they know.

Now to know, but to know, that's curioſity.

To know, to be known, that's vain glory.

But to know, to practiſe what we know, that is Goſpel duty.

This makes a man a compleat Chriſtian; the other without this makes a man *almoſt*, and yet but *almoſt* a Chriſtian.

2. *A Man may have great and eminent gifts, yea ſpiritual gifts*, and yet be but almoſt a Chriſtian. The gift of prayer is a ſpiritual gift; now this a man may have, and yet be but almoſt a *Chriſtian*; for the gift of Prayer is one thing, the grace of Prayer is another.

The gift of Preaching and propheſying is a ſpiritual gift, now this a man may have, and yet be but *almoſt a Chriſtian. Judas* was a great Preacher, ſo were they that came to Chriſt, and ſaid, *Lord, Lord, we have propheſied in thy Name, and in thy Name have caſt out Devils*, &c. 1 Cor. 12. 10. Mat. 7. 22.

You muſt know, that it is not gifts, but grace

grace, which makes a Christian: For,

1. Gifts are from a common work of the Spirit, now a man may partake of all the common gifts of the Spirit, and yet be a Reprobate; for therefore they are called common, because they are indifferently dispensed by the Spirit to good and bad: to them that are Believers, and to them that are not.

They that have grace, have gifts; and they that have no grace, may have the same gifts; for the Spirit works in both, nay in this sense, he that hath no grace, may be under a greater work of the Spirit (*quoad hoc*) as to this thing, than he that hath most grace; a graceless professor may have greater gifts than the most Holy Believer: He may out-pray and out-preach, and out-do them; but they in sincerity and integrity out-go him.

Eph. 4. 12. *Dona dantur in adjutorium gratiæ.* The Raven was an unclean Bird. God makes use of her to feed *Elijah*; though she was not good *Meat*, yet it was good *Meat* she brought.

2. Gifts are for the use and good of others, they are given *in ordine ad alium*, as the School-men speak, for the profiting and edifying of others; so says the Apostle, 1 *Cor.* 12.7. *They are given to profit withall.*

Now a man may edifie another by his Gifts, and yet be unedified himself; he may be profitable to another, and yet unprofitable to himself.

A lame man may with his Crutch point to thee the right way, and yet not be able to walk in it himself: A crooked Taylor, may make a Suit to fit a streight body though it fit not him that made it, because of his crookedness.

The Church (Christs Garden enclosed) may be watered through a wooden gutter, the Sun may give light through a sluttish window,

window, and the Field may be well sowed with a dirty hand.

The efficacy of the Word doth not depend upon the Authority of him that speaks it, but upon the Authority of the God that blesses it. So that another may be converted by my Preaching, and yet I may be a *cast-away* notwithstanding. *Balaam* makes a clear and rare Prophesie of Christ, and yet he hath no benefit by Christ; *There shall come a Star out of* Jacob, *and a Scepter shall rise out of* Israel; but yet *Balaam* shall have no benefit by it; *I shall see him, but not now; I shall behold him, but not nigh*, Numbers 4. 17. 1 Cor. 9. 27.

God may use a mans Gifts to bring another unto Christ, when he himself, whose gifts God uses, may be a stranger unto Christ; one man may confirm another in the Faith, and yet himself may be a stranger unto the Faith. *Pendleton* strengthens and confirms *Sanders*, in Queen *Maries* days, to stand in the truth he had Preached, and to Seal it with his Blood, and yet afterwards plays the Apostate himself. *Act. & Mon.* last *Edit.* 3. v. p. 141.

Scultetus tells us of on *Johannes Speiserus*, a famous Preacher of *Ausborough* in *Germany*, in the year 1523. who Preached the Gospel so powerfully, that divers common *Harlots* were converted, and became good Christians, and yet himself afterwards turned Papist, and came to a miserable end. *Scultet. Annal.* p. 111.

Thus the Candle may burn bright to light others in their Work, and yet afterwards go out in a stink.

3. It is beyond the power of the greatest Gifts to change the heart; a man may Preach like an Apostle, Pray like an Angel, and yet may have the heart of a Devil. It

is

is Grace only that can change the heart; the greatest Gifts can't change it, but the least *Grace* can; Gifts may make a man a Scholar, but Grace makes a man a Believer.

Now if Gifts can't change the heart, then a man may have the greatest Gifts, and yet be but *almost a Christian.*

4. Many have gone loaden with Gifts to Hell; no doubt *Judas* had great Gifts, for he was a Preacher of the Gospel; and our Lord Jesus Christ would not set him in the work, and not fit him for the work; yet *Judas is gone to his own place*; the *Scribes* and *Pharisees* were men of great Gifts, and yet, *Where is the wise? Where is the Scribe?*

1 Cor. 1. 20. and 1. 18. *The Preaching of the Cross, is to them that perish, foolishness.*

Them that perish, who are they? who? the wise and learned, both among *Jews* and *Greeks*; these are called *them that perish. Surgunt indocti & rapiunt cœlum, dum nos cum doctrina nostra in Gehennam detrudimur*, said a great Bishop when he saw a poor shepherd weeping over a Toad. The poor illiterate world attain to Heaven, while we with all our learning fall into hell.

There are three things must be done for us, if ever we would avoid perishing.

We must be throughly convinced of sin.

We must be really united to Christ.

We must be instated in the Covenant of Grace.

Now the greatest gifts cannot stead us in any one of these.

They cannot work thorough convictions.

They cannot effect our Union.

They cannot bring us into Covenant relation.

And consequently they cannot preserve from

from eternal perishing; and if so, then a man may have the greatest *Gifts*, and yet be but almost a Christian. John 4. 14.

5. Gifts may decay and perish: They do not lye beyond the reach of Corruption; indeed Grace shall never Perish, but Gifts will; Grace is incorruptible, though Gifts are not; Grace is *a Spring, whose waters fail not*, but the streams of Gifts may be dryed up. If Grace be corruptible in its own *nature*, as being but a Creature; yet it is incorruptible in regard of its conserver, as being the new creature; he that did create it in us, will conserve it in us; he that did begin it, will also finish it. Isaiah 58.11, Heb. 12. 2.

Gifts have their Root in Nature, but Grace hath its Root in Christ; and therefore tho' Gifts may die and wither, yet Grace shall abide for ever.

Now if Gifts are perishing, then (though he that hath the *least Grace* is a Christian, yet) he that hath the greatest *gifts* may be but almost a Christian.

But doth not the Apostle bid us, *covet earnestly the best gifts*? 1 Cor. 12. 31. Why must we covet them, and covet them earnestly, if they avail not to Salvation? *Object.*

Gifts are good, though they are not the best good; they are excellent, but there is somewhat more excellent; so it follows in the same verse; *yet I shew unto you a more excellent way*. and that is the way of Grace; one dram of Grace is more worth than a Talent of Gifts: Gifts may make us rich towards men, but it is Grace that makes us *rich towards God*. *Ans.* Luke 12. 21.

Our Gifts profit others, but Grace profits our selves; that whereby I profit another is good, but that whereby I am profited my self is better.

Now

Now because Gifts are good, therefore we ought to covet them; but because they are not the best good, therefore we ought not to rest in them; we must covet gifts for the good of others, that they may be edified; and we must covet Grace for the good of our own Souls, that they may be saved; for whosoever be bettered by our Gifts, yet we shall miscarry without Grace.

3. *A man may have a high Profession of Religion, be much in external duties of Godliness, and yet be but almost a Christian* Mark what our Lord Christ tells them in *Mat.* 7. 21. *Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the Kingdom of Heaven*; that is, not every one that makes a Profession of Christ, shall therefore be owned for a true Disciple of Christ; *all are not Israel that are of Israel*; nor are all Christians that make a Profession of Religion.

Rom. 9. 6.

What a goodly Profession had *Judas!* he followed Christ left all for Christ, he preached the Gospel of Christ, he cast out Devils in the name of Christ, he ate and drank at the Table of Christ, and yet *Judas* was but an Hypocrite.

Most Professors are like Lilies, fair in shew, but foul in scent; or like Pepper, hot in the mouth, but cold in the stomach. The finest Lace may be upon the coursest Cloth.

It is a great deceit to measure the substance of our Religion by the bulk of our Profession, and to judge of the strength of our Graces by the length of our Duties. The Scripture speaks of some, who having *a form of Godliness, yet deny the Power thereof.* Deny the power, that is, they don't live in the practice of those Graces which they pre-

2 Tim. 3. 5.

tend

tend to in their Duties; he that pretends to Godliness by a specious Profession, and yet doth not practise Godliness by a holy Conversation, *he hath a form, but denies the power.*

Hugo compares such to the Ostrich, *qui alas habet, sed non volat*, which hath great Wings, but yet flies not; many have the wings of a fair profession, but yet use them not to mount upward in spiritual affections, and a Heavenly conversation. *Loquitur hic ut Piso, vivit ut Gallanius.*

But to clear the truth of this, That a man may make a high profession of Religion, and yet be but almost a Christian; take a four-fold evidence.

1. If a man may profess Religion, and yet never have his heart changed, nor his state better'd, then he may be a great Professor, and yet be but almost a Christian.

But a man may profess Religion, and yet never have his heart changed, nor his state renewed.

He may be a constant hearer of the word, and yet be a sinner still; he may come often to the Lords Table, and yet go away a sinner as he came; we must not think that duties, *ex opere operato*, can confer Grace.

Many a Soul hath been converted by Christ in an Ordinance, but never was any Soul converted by an Ordinance without Christ.

And doth Christ convert all that sit under the Ordinances? surely no, for to some, *the word is a savour of Death unto Death.* 1 Cor. 2. 16.

And if so, then it is plain, that a man may profess Religion, and yet be but *almost a Christian.*

2. A man may profess Religion, and live in a form of Godliness in Hypocrisie, *Isa.* 48. 1. *Hear ye this, O house of Jacob, which are*

are called by the Name of Israel, and are come forth out of the waters of Judah, which swear by the Name of the Lord, and make mention of the God of Israel, but not in truth, nor in Righteousness. What do ye think of these? *They make mention of the name of the Lord*, there is their Profession; *but not in truth, nor in righteousness*, there is their dissimulation; and indeed there could be no Hypocrisie in a religious sence, were it not for a Profession of Religion; for he that is wicked and carnal, and vile inwardly, and appears to be so outwardly, he is no Hypocrite, but is what he appears, and appears what he is.

Hypocrita cupit videri justus.

But he that is one thing really, and another thing seemingly, is carnal and unholy, and yet seems to be good and holy, he is an Hypocrite.

Tollet Instit. Sacr. l. 8. c. 9.

Thus the *Casuists* define Hypocrisie to be *Simulatio Sanctitatis*, a counterfeiting of holiness; and this fits exactly with the *Greek* word ὑποκρισις, which is from ὑποκρίνομαι, to counterfeit.

פנים חנפים from the root חנף

And to this purpose, the Hebrews have two words for Hypocrites, *Panim* which signifies *facies*, and *Chanepim* which signifies *Counterfeits*, from *Chanaph*, to dissemble; so that he is an Hypocrite that dissembles Religion, and weareth the face of Holiness, and yet is without the grace of Holiness; he appears to be in semblance, what he is not in substance, he wears a form of Godliness; without, only as a cover of a Prophane heart within.

He hath a *Profession* that he may not be thought wicked; but it is but a *Profession*, and therefore he is wicked.

He is the Religious Hypocrite; *Religious*, because he pretends to it; and yet an Hypocrite

pocrite, becauſe he doth but pretend to it; he is like many men in a Conſumption; that have freſh looks, and yet rotten Lungs: or like an Apple that hath a skin fair, but a rotten Coar; many appear righteous, who are only righteous in appearance.

And if ſo, then a man may profeſs Religion, and yet be but almoſt a Chriſtian.

3. Cuſtom and Faſhion may create a man a Profeſſor; as you have many that wear this or that Garb, not becauſe it keeps them warmer, or hath any excellency in it more than another, but meerly for faſhion.

Many muſt have powder'd hair, ſpotted faces, feathers in their Caps, *&c.* for no other end, but becauſe they would be fools in faſhion.

So many profeſs Chriſtianity, not becauſe the means of Grace warms the Heart, or that they ſee any excellency in the ways of God above the World, but merely to follow the faſhion: I wiſh I might not ſay, it hath been true of our days, becauſe Religion hath been uppermoſt, therefore many have profeſſed; it hath been the gaining Trade, and then moſt will be of that Trade.

Religion in credit makes many Proteſſors, but few Proſelytes; but when Religion ſuffers, then its Confeſſors are no more than its Converts, for Cuſtom makes the former, but Conſcience the latter.

He that is a Profeſſor of Religion merely for cuſtom-ſake, when it proſpers, will never be a Martyr for Chriſt's ſake, when Religion ſuffers.

He that owns the truth, to live upon that, will diſown it when it comes to live upon him.

They ſay, that when a Houſe is decaying and

and falling all the Rats and Mice will forsake it: while the house is firm, and they may shelter in the roof, they'l stay, but no longer, lest in their decay the fall should be upon them, and they that lived at top should lie at bottom.

My Brethren, may I not say, we have many that are the Vermine, the Rats and Mice of Religion, that would live under the roof of it, while they might have shelter in it; but when it suffers, forsake it, lest it should fall, and the fall should be upon them. I am perswaded this is not the least reason why God hath brought the wheel upon the profession of Religion; *viz.* to rid it of the Vermine.

He shakes the Foundation of the House, that these Rats and Mice may quit the roof; not to overturn it, but to rid them out of it, as the Husbandman fans the Wheat, that he may get rid of the Chaff. The Halcyon-days of the Gospel provoke Hypocrisie, but the sufferings for Religion prove Sincerity.

Now then, if custom and fashion make many men Professors, then a man may profess Religion, *and yet be but almost a Christian.*

4. If many may perish under a Profession of Godliness, then a man may profess Religion, *and yet be but almost a Christian.*

Now the Scripture is clear, that a man may perish under the highest Profession of Religion. *Christ cursed the Fig-tree, that had leaves and no fruit.* It is said, *Mat.* 8. 12. *that the Children of the Kingdom shall be cast out into outer darkness.* Who were these, but they that were then the only people of God in the World by Profession, *that had made a Covenant with him by Sacrifice?* and yet these cast out.

Psal. 50. 5.

In

In *Mat.* 7. 22. you read of some that came and made boast of their Profession to Christ, hoping that might save them; *Lord* (say they) *have we not Prophesied in thy name, cast out Devils in thy name, done many wonderfull works in thy name?* Mat. 7. 22.

Now what saith our Lord Christ to this? *Then I will profess unto them, I never knew you; depart from me.* Verse 23.

Mark here are them that Prophesie in his Name, and yet perish in his Wrath; in his Name cast out Devils, and then are cast out themselves; *In his name do many wonderfull works*, and yet perish for wicked workers.

The Profession of Religion will no more keep a man from perishing, than calling a Ship the *Safeguard*, or the *Goodspeed*, will keep her from drowning.

As many go to Heaven with the fear of Hell in their hearts, so many go to Hell with the name of Christ in their Mouths. Now then, if many may perish under a profession of Godliness, then may a man be a high Professor of Religion, and yet be but *almost a Christian.*

Objection. But is it not said by the Lord Christ himself, *He that Confesses me before men, him will I confess before my Father in Heaven?* Mat. 10. 23.

Now for Christ to say, he will confess us before the Father, is equivalent to a Promise of Eternal Life; for if Jesus Christ confess us, God the Father will never disown us.

Sol. True, they that confess Christ, shall be confessed by him; and it is as true, that this Confession is equivalent to a promise of Salvation. But now you must know, that professing Christ, is not confessing him; for to profess Christ is one thing, to confess

Christ is another: Confession is a living Testimony for Christ, in a time when Religion suffers, Profession may be only a lifeless Formality in a time when Religion prospers. To confess Christ, is to choose his ways, and own them. To profess Christ, is to plead for his ways, and yet live besides them. Profession may be from a feigned love to the ways of Christ, but Confession is from a rooted love to the Person of Christ.

To profess Christ, is to own him when none deny him; to confess Christ, is to plead for him, and suffer for him, when others oppose him; Hypocrites may be Professors, but the Martyrs are the true Confessors: Profession is a *swimming* down the Stream, Confession is a swimming against the Stream. Now many may swim with the Stream (like the dead Fish) that cannot swim against the Stream with the living Fish; many may profess Christ that can't confess Christ, and so, notwithstanding their Profession, yet are but *almost Christians.*

4. To come yet nearer; *A man may go far in opposing his Sin, and yet be but almost a Christian.* How far a Man may go in this work I shall shew you in seven gradual Instances.

1. A man *may be convinced of Sin, and yet be but almost a Christian:* For,

1. Conviction may be rational, as well as spiritual; it may be from a natural Conscience enlightned by the Word, without the effectual work of the Spirit, applying Sin to the Heart.

2. Convictions may be worn out; they many times go off, and end not in sound Conversion; saith the Church, *We have been with Child, we have been in pain, we have brought forth wind.* This is the complaint

Isaiah 26. 18.

the Church in reference to the unprofitableness of their Afflictions; and it may be the complaint of most in reference to the unprofitableness of their Convictions.

3. Many take Convictions of Sin to be Conversion from Sin, and so sit down, and rest in their Convictions. That is a sad complaint God makes of *Ephraim*; *Ephraim is an unwise Son, for he should not stay long in the place of the breaking forth of Children.* Now then, if Convictions may be only from natural Conscience, if they may be worn out, or may be mistaken, and rested in for Conversion, then a man may have Convictions, and be but almost a Christian. Hos. 13. 13.

Secondly, *A man may mourn for Sin, and yet be but almost a Christian*; so did *Saul*, so did *Esau*, for the loss of his Birth-right, which was his Sin, and therefore he is called by the Spirit of God, *Prophane Esau*; yet he sought it again carefully with *tears*. Heb. 12. 16, 17.

But doth not Christ pronounce them blessed that mourn? *Mat.* 5. 4. *Blessed are they that mourn.* *Obj.*

Sure then, if a man mourn for Sin, he is in a good condition: You see, saith *Nazianzen*, τῷ πενθοῦντι τὴν σωτηρίαν συνεζευγμένην, that Salvation is joyned with Sorrow. *Orat.* 17. *Greg. Naz.*

I answer, It is true, that they who mourn for Sin in the sense Christ there speaks of, are blessed; but all mourning for sin, doth not therefore render us blessed. *Sol.*

1. True mourning for sin must flow from spiritual convictions of the evil and vileness, and damnable nature of sin.

Now all that mourn for sin, don't do it from a thorough-work of spiritual Conviction upon the Soul; they have not a right sense of the evil and vileness of sin.

2. True mourning for sin, is more for the evil that is in sin, than the evil that comes by sin; more because it dishonours God and wounds Christ, and grieves the Spirit, and makes the Soul unlike God, than because it damns the Soul.

Now there are many that mourn for sin, not so much for the evil that is in it, as for the evil that it brings with it, there is mourning for sin in Hell; you read of *weeping and*
Mat. 8. 12. *wailing there.* The damned are weeping and mourning to eternity, there is all sorrow, and no comfort; as in Heaven there is peace without trouble, joy without mourning, so in Hell there is trouble without peace, mourning without joy, weeping and wailing incessantly; but it is for the evil they feel by sin, and not for the evil that is in sin: So that a man may mourn for sin, and yet be but *almost a Christian*: it may grieve him to think of perishing for sin, when it doth not grieve him that he is defiled and polluted by sin.

Thirdly; *A man may make large confession of sin, to God, to others, and yet be but almost a Christian.*

How ingenuously doth *Saul* confess his
1 Sam. 24. 17. sin to *David*, *I have sinned* (saith he,) *thou*
Jud. 26. 21. *art more righteous than I! Behold I have played the fool, and have erred exceedingly.*

Mat. 27. 4. So *Judas* makes a full confession, *I have sinned in betraying innocent blood.*

* 1 Joh. 1. 9. *Peccatorum confessio synecdoche universam pœnitentiam hoc loco significat.* Vorst. in loc.

Yet *Saul* and *Judas* were both rejected of God; so that a man may confess sin, and yet be but *almost a Christian.*

Obj. But is not confession of sin, a character of a Child of God; Doth not the Apostle say.* *If we confess our sins, God is just and faithful to forgive them:* No man was ever

kept

kept out of Heaven for his confessed badness, though many are kept out of Heaven for their supposed goodness.

Judah, in *Hebrew* signifies *confession*; now *Judah* got the Kingdom from *Reuben*; confession of sin is the way to the Kingdom of Heaven.

There are some that confess sin and are saved, there are others that confess sin and perish.

1. Many confess sin meerly out of custom, and not out of Conscience: you shall have many that will never pray, but they will make a long confession of sin, and yet never feel the weight or burden of it upon their Consciences.

2. Many will confess lesser sins, and yet conceal greater; like the Patient in *Plutarch*, that complained to his Physician of his hunger, when his Liver was rotten.

3. Many will confess sin in the general, or confess themselves sinners; and confess little, and say less of their particular sins, an implicite confession (as one saith) is almost as bad as an implicite faith.

Where confession is right, it will be distinct, especially of those sins that were our chief Sins.

So *David confesses his Blood guiltiness and* Psal. 51. *Adultery*; So *Paul his Blasphemy, Persecution,* 1 Tim. 1. 13. *and Injury against the Saints.* It is bad to hear men confess they are great Sinners, and yet can't confess their Sins.

Though the least Sin be too bad to be committed, yet there is no Sin too bad to be confessed.

4. Many will confess Sin, but it is only under extremity, that is not free and voluntary. *Pharaoh* confesses his Sin, but it was when Judgment compelled him.

I have sinned against the Lord, saith he, Exod. 10. 16.

but it was when he had eight Plagues upon him.

Many do by their Sins, as Mariners do by their Goods, cast them out in a storm, wishing for them again in a calm. Confession should come like Water out of a Spring, which runs freely, not like Water out of a Still, which is forced by Fire.

5. Many confess their Sin, but with no intent to forsake sin; they confess the Sins they have committed, but don't leave the Sins they have confessed.

Many men use Confession as *Lewis* the Eleventh of *France* did his Crucifix; he would swear an Oath, and then kiss it, and swear again, and then kiss it again.

So many sin, and then confess they do not well, but yet never strive to do better.

Mr. *Torshel* tells a story of a Minister he knew, that would be often drunk, and when he came into the Pulpit, would confess it very lamentingly; and yet no sooner was he out of the Pulpit, but he would be drunk again; and this would he do as constantly as men follow their Trades.

Now then, if a man may confess Sin meerly out of custom; if he may confess lesser Sins, and yet conceal greater; if he may confess Sin only in the General, or only under extremity, or if he may confess Sin without any intent to forsake Sin, then surely a man may confess Sin, and yet be but *almost a Christian.*

Fourthly, *A man may forsake Sin, and yet be but almost a Christian*; he may leave his Lust, and his wicked ways, which he sometimes lived in, and in the judgment of the World become a new Man, and yet not be a new Creature. *Simon Magus*, when he hears

hears *Philip* preaching concerning the Kingdom of God, leaves his Sorcery and Witchcraft, and believes. Acts 8. 13.

But you'l ſay, this ſeems contrary to Scripture; for that ſays, *He that confeſſeth, and forſaketh Sin, ſhall have mercy*: But I confeſs Sin, yea, not only ſo, but alſo I forſake Sin; ſure therefore his mercy is my portion, it belongs to me. Objection. Pro. 28. 13.

It is true, that where the Soul forſakes Sin from a right principle, after a right manner, to a right end; where he forſakes Sin as Sin, as being contrary to God, and the purity of his Nature: *Sol.*

This declares that Soul to be right with God, and the Promiſe ſhall be made good to it, *He ſhall find mercy.*

But now pray mind, there is a forſaking Sin that is not right, but unſound.

1. Open Sins may be deſerted, and yet ſecret Sins may be retained; now this is not a right forſaking; ſuch a Soul ſhall never find mercy. A man may be cured of a wound in his fleſh, and yet may die of an impoſtume in his Bowels.

2. A man may forſake ſin, but not as ſin; for he that forſakes ſin as ſin, forſakes all ſin; *A quatenus ad omne valet conſequentia*: it is impoſſible for a man to forſake ſin as ſin, unleſs he forſakes all that he knows to be ſin.

3. A man may let one ſin go, to hold another the faſter; as a man that goes to Sea, would willingly ſave all his goods, but if the ſtorm ariſes that he cannot, then he throws ſome over board to lighten the Veſſel, and ſave the reſt. So did they, *Acts* 27. 38.

So the ſinner chuſes to keep all his ſins,

but if a storm arises in his Conscience, why then he will heave one lust over-board to save the life of another.

4 A man may let all sin go, and yet be a Sinner still; for there is the root of all sin in the heart, though the fruit be not seen in the life; the tree lives, though the Boughs be lopt off.

As a man is a sinner before ever he acts sin, so (till grace renew him) he is a sinner, though he leaves sin; for there is original sin in him enough to damn and destroy him.

Psal. 51. 5. 5. Sin may be left, and yet beloved; a man may forsake the life of sin, and yet retain the love of sin; now though leaving sin makes him almost a Christian, yet loving sin shews he is but *almost a Christian.*

It is a less evil to do sin, and not love it, than to love sin and not do it; for to do sin may argue only weakness of *Grace*, but to love sin argues strength of *lust*. *What I hate, that do I*, Rom. 7. 15.

Sin is bad in any part of man, but sin in the affection is worse than sin in the Conversation; for sin in the Conversation may be only from infirmity, but sin in the affection is the fruit of choice and unregeneracy.

6. All sin may be chained; and yet the heart not changed, and so the nature of the sinner is the same as ever.

A Dog chained up is a Dog still, as much as if he was let loose to devour.

There may be a cessation of arms between enemies, and yet the quarrel may remain on foot still; there may be a making truce, where there is no making Peace.

A sinner may lay the weapons of sin out of his hand, and yet the enmity against God still remain in his heart.

There

There may be a truce, he may not sin against him, but there can be no Peace till he be united unto him.

Restraining grace holds in the sinner, but it is renewing Grace that changes the Nature. Now many are held in by grace from being open sinners, that are not renewed by Grace and made true Believers.

Now then, If a man may forsake open sins, and retain secret sins; if he may forsake sin, but not as sin: if he may let one sin go to hold another the faster; if a man may let all sin go, and yet be a sinner still; if sin may be left, and yet be loved: Finally, if all sin may be chained, and yet the heart not changed; then a man may forsake sin, and yet be but *almost a Christian.*

Fifthly, *A man may hate Sin, and yet be but almost a Christian.* *Absalom* hated *Ammon's* Uncleanness with his Sister *Thamar*, yea, his hatred was so great, as that he slew him for it; and yet *Absalom* was but a wicked man. 2 Samuel 13. 12, 28.

But the Scripture makes it a sign of a gracious Heart to hate Sin; yea, though a man do through infirmity fall into Sin, yet if he hates it, this is a proof of Grace. *Paul* proves the sincerity of his Heart, and the truth of his Grace, by his hatred of Sin, though he committed it, *Rom.* 7. 15. *What I hate, that do I.* Objection.

Nay, what is Grace, but *conformitas cum Archetypo*, a conformity of the Soul to God, to love as God loves, to hate as God hates: Now God hates Sin, it is one part of his Holiness to hate all Sin.

And if I hate Sin, then am I conformed to God, and if I am conformed to God, then am I altogether a Christian.

It is true, that there is a hatred of Sin, which is a ſign of Grace, and which flows from a principle of Grace, and is Grace. As for inſtance,

To hate Sin as it is an offence to God, a wrong to his Majeſty; to hate Sin as it is a breach of the Command, and ſo a wicked controlling God's Will, which is the only Rule of goodneſs; to hate Sin, as being a diſingenuous tranſgreſſion of that Law of Love eſtabliſhed in the blood and death of Chriſt, and ſo in a degree a *crucifying of Chriſt afreſh*:

To hate Sin as being a grieving and quenching the Spirit of God, as all Sin in its nature is:

Thus to hate Sin is Grace, and thus every true Chriſtian hates Sin.

But though every man that hath Grace, hates Sin, yet every man that hates Sin, hath not Grace; For,

A man may hate Sin from other Principles, not as it is a wrong to God, or a wounding *Chriſt*, or a grieving the Spirit, for then he would hate all Sin; for there is no Sin but hath this in the nature of it. But,

1. A man may hate Sin for the ſhame that attends it, more than for the evil that is in it. Some Sinners there are, who declare *their Sin as* Sodom, *and hide it not.* They are ſet down in the *ſeat of the ſcornful, they glory in their ſhame*, Phil. 3:19. But now others there are who are aſhamed of Sin, and therefore hate it, not for the Sin's ſake, but for the ſhame's ſake. This made *Abſolom* hate *Amnon*'s Uncleanneſs, becauſe it brought ſhame upon him and his Siſter.

Pſal. 1. 1.

2. A man may hate Sin more in others than

than in himſelf: So doth the Drunkard, he hates Drunkenneſs in another, and yet practiſes it himſelf: The Lyar hates falſhood in another, but likes it in himſelf. Now he that hates Sin from a Principle of Grace, hates Sin moſt in himſelf; he hates Sin in others, but he loaths moſt the Sins of his own Heart.

3. A man may hate one Sin as being contrary to another. There is a great contrariety between Sin and Sin, between Luſt and Luſt: It is the excellency of the life of Grace, that it is an uniform life: there is no one Grace contrary to another; the Graces of God's Spirit are different, but not differing, faith, and love, and holineſs, are all one; they conſiſt together at the ſame time, in the ſame ſubject; nay, they can't be parted; there can be no faith without love, no love without holineſs; and ſo on the other hand, no holineſs without love, no love without faith. So that this makes the life of Grace an eaſie and excellent life, but now the life of Sin is a diſtracting contradictious life, wherein a man is a ſervant to contrary luſts: the luſt of pride and prodigality, is contrary to the luſt of covetouſneſs. *&c.* Titus 3. 3.

Now when one luſt gets to be the Maſter-luſt in the Soul, then that works a hatred of its contrary; where covetouſneſs gets the heart, there the heart hates pride; and where pride gets uppermoſt in the heart, there the heart hates covetouſneſs. Thus a man may hate ſin, not from a Principle of *Grace*, but from the contrariety of *Luſt*.

He don't hate any ſin as it is ſin, but he hates it, as being contrary to his beloved ſin.

Now then, if a man may hate ſin for the ſhame

shame that attends it: if he may hate sin more in others, than in himself: and if he may hate one sin as being contrary to another, then he may hate sin, and yet be but *almost a Christian.*

Sixthly, *A man may make great vows and promises, he may have strong purposes and resolutions against sin, and yet be but almost a Christian.*

1 Sam. 26. 21. Thus did *Saul*, he promises and resolves against his sin, *Return, my Son David*, saith he, *for I will no more do thee harm.* What promises and resolves did *Pharaoh* make against that Sin of detaining Gods people? Exod. 8. 8. Saith he, *I will let the people go, that they may do Sacrifice to the Lord:* And again, *I will let you go, and ye shall stay no longer*, Exod. 9. 28. And yet *Saul* and *Pharaoh* both perished in their sins: the greatest purposes and promises against sin, will not make a man a Christian: For,

1. Purposes and Promises against sin, never hurt sin: we say, *threatned folk live long*; and truly so do threatned sins. It is not new purposes, but a new nature, that must help us against sin; purposes may bring to the birth, but without a new nature, *there is no strength to bring forth.* The new nature is the best soil for holy purposes to grow in; otherwise they wither and die, like plants in an improper soil.

2. Troubles and Afflictions may provoke us to large purposes and promises against sin for the future; what more common than to vow, and not to pay; to make vows in the day of trouble, which we make no Conscience to pay in the day of peace? Many Covenant against sin, when trouble is upon them; and then sin against their Covenant, when it is removed from them. It

It was a brave rule that *Pliny* in one of his Epistles gave his friend to live by, *Ut tales esse perseveremus sani, quales nos futuros esse profitemur infirmi; That we should continue to be such when we are well, as we promise to be when we are sick.*

Many are our sick-bed promises, but we are no sooner well, but we grow sick of our promises.

3. Purposes and resolves against Sin for the future, may be only a temptation to put off Repentance for the present; Satan may put a man on to good purposes, to keep him from present attempts.

He knows whatever we purpose, yet the strength of performance is not in our selves.

He knows that purposes for the future, are a putting God off for the present; they are a secret *will not*, to a present opportunity. That is a notable passage, *Luk.* 9. 59. *Follow me*, saith Christ, to the two men; Now see what answers they give to Christ? *Suffer me first to go and bury my Father*, says one; This man purposes to follow Christ only he would stay to bury his Father: Says the other, *Lord, I will follow thee, but let me first go and bid them farewell which are at my house*, verse 61. I will follow thee, but only I would first go and take my leave of my Friends, or set my House in order; and yet we do not find that ever they followed Christ, notwithstanding their fair purposes.

4. Nature unsanctified may be so far wrought on, as to make great Promises and Purposes against Sin.

1. A natural man may have great Convictions of Sin from the workings of an enlightned Conscience.

2. He may approve of the Law of God.

3. He

3. He may have a desire to be saved.

Now these three together; The workings of Conscience, the sight of the goodness of the Law; a desire to be saved, may bring forth in a man great purposes against Sin, and yet he may have no heart to perform his own purposes. This was much what the case of them, *Deut.* 5. say they to *Moses*, verse 27. *Go thou near, and hear all that the Lord our God shall say; and tell thou it to us, and we will hear it, and do it.*

This is a fair promise, and so God takes it, *verse* 28. *I have heard the words of this people, they have well said all that they have spoken.* So said, and so done, had been well, but it was better said than done; for though they had a tongue to promise, yet they had no heart to perform, and this God saw, therefore said he, *v.* 29. *O that there were such an heart in them, that they would fear me, and keep my Commandments always, that it might be well with them!*

They promise to fear God and keep his Commandments, but they wanted a new heart to perform what an unsanctified heart had promised: It fares with men in this case, as it did with the Son in the Gospel, that *Mat.* 21. 30. said, *He would go into the Vineyard, but went not.*

Now then if purposes and promises against sin, never hurt sin; if present afflictions may draw out large *Promises*, if they may be the fruit of a *Temptation*, or if from nature unsanctified; surely then a man may promise and purpose much against sin, and yet be but *almost a Christian.*

Seventhly, *A man may maintain a strife and combate against sin in himself, and yet be but almost a Christian.* So did *Balaam*, when

when he went to Curſe the People of God, he had a great ſtrife within himſelf; *How ſhall I Curſe* (ſaith he) *where God hath not Curſed? Or how ſhall I defie whom the Lord hath not defied?* Numb. 23. 8.

And did not *Pilate* ſtrive againſt his ſin, when he ſaid to the *Jews*, *Shall I crucifie your King? What evil hath he done? I am innocent of the blood of this juſt man.* Mark 15. 12, 14. Mat. 27. 24.

But you will ſay, *Is not this an argument of grace, when there is a ſtriving in the Soul againſt ſin? for what ſhould oppoſe ſin in the heart, but grace?* The Apoſtle makes *the luſting of the Fleſh againſt the Spirit, and the Spirit againſt the Fleſh*, to be an argument of grace in the heart. Now I find this ſtrife in my heart; though the remainders of corruption ſometimes break out into actual ſins, yet I find a ſtriving in my Soul againſt ſin. Object. Gal. 5. 17.

It is true, there is a ſtriving againſt ſin which is only from grace, and is proper to believers; and there is a ſtriving againſt ſin which is not from grace, and therefore may be in them that are not believers. *Sol.*

There is a ſtrife againſt ſin in one and the ſame faculty; the will againſt the will; the affection againſt the affection, and this is that which the Apoſtle calls *the luſting of the Fleſh againſt the Spirit*; that is, the ſtriving of the unregenerate part againſt the regenerate; and this is ever in the faculty, and is proper to believers only.

An unbeliever never finds this ſtrife in himſelf, this ſtrife cannot be in him, it is impoſſible (as ſuch) that is, while he is on this ſide a ſtate of Grace.

But then there is a ſtriving againſt ſin in divers faculties, and this is the ſtrife that is

in

in them that are not Believers, there the strife is between the will and the Conscience; Conscience enlightned and terrified with the fear of Hell & damnation, that is against sin; the will and affection (not being renewed) they are for sin. And this causes great tuggings and strong combates many times in the sinners heart.

Video meliora proboque, deteriora sequor.

Thus it was with the *Scribes* and *Pharisees*; Conscience convinced them of the Divinity of Christ, and of the truth of his being the Son of God, and yet a perverse will, and carnal affections, cry out, *Crucifie him, Crucifie him.*

Conscience pleaded for him, he had a witness in their Bosoms, and yet their wills were bent against him, and therefore they are said *to have resisted the Spirit*: viz. the workings and convictions of the Spirit in their Consciences, *Acts* 7. 51. And this is the case of many sinners, when will and affections are for sin, and plead for it, Conscience is against it, and many times frights the Soul from the doing of it.

And hence men take that which oppose sin in them, to be grace, when it is only the work of a natural Conscience; they conclude the strife is between Grace and Sin, the regenerate and unregenerate part, when alas it is no other than the contention of a natural Conscience against a corrupt will and affections.

And if so, then a man may have great strifes and combates against sin in him; and yet be but *almost a Christian.*

5. *A man may desire Grace, and yet be but almost a Christian*; so did *the five foolish Virgins*, Mat. 25 8. *Give us of your Oyl*; what was that but true grace? it was that Oyl that lighted

lighted the wiſe Virgins into the Bridegrooms Chamber.

They do not only deſire to enter in, but they deſire Oyl to light them in; wicked men may deſire Heaven, deſire a Chriſt to ſave them; there is none ſo wicked upon Earth, but deſire to be happy in Heaven.

But now here are they that deſire Grace as well as Glory, and yet theſe are but *almoſt Chriſtians.*

But is it not commonly taught, that *deſires of Grace are Grace?* nay, doth not our Lord Chriſt himſelf make it ſo? *Bleſſed are they that hunger and thirſt after Righteouſneſs, for they ſhall be filled.* Object. Mat. 5. 6.

It is true, that there are ſome deſires of Grace which are Grace: As, Sol.

1. When a man deſires Grace from a right ſenſe of his natural ſtate, when he ſees the vileneſs of Sin, and the woful, defiled and loathſome condition he is in by reaſon of Sin, and therefore deſires the Grace of Chriſt to renew and change him; this is Grace. This ſome make to be the loweſt degree of ſaving Faith.

2. When a man joyns proportionable endeavours to his deſires; doth not only wiſh for Grace, but work for Grace, ſuch deſires are Grace.

3. When a mans deſires are conſtant and unceſſant, that ceaſe not but in the attainment of their Object; ſuch deſires are true Grace. They are a part of the eſpecial work of the Spirit. They do really partake of the nature of Grace; now it is a known Maxim, *Quicquid participat de natura totius, eſt pars totius: That which partakes of the nature of the whole, is a part of the whole*; the filings of Gold are Gold.

The

The Sea is not more really Water than the least drop; the Flame is not more really Fire, than the least spark; for these do *participare de natura totius.*

But though all true desires of Grace, are Grace; yet all desires of Grace are not true: For,

1. A man may desire Grace, but not for it self, but for somewhat else; not Grace for Graces sake, but for Heavens sake; he don't desire Grace, that his Nature may be changed, his Heart renewed, the Image of God stampt upon him, and his Lusts subdued in him.

These are blessed desires, found only in true Believers. The true Christian only can desire Grace for Graces sake; but the Almost Christian may desire Grace for Heavens sake.

2. A man may desire Grace without proportionable endeavours after Grace; many are good at wishing, bad at working; like him that lay on the grass on a Summers day, crying out, *O si esset laborare!* O that this were to work!

Virtutem exoptant, contabescuntque relicta. Pers.

Solomon saith, *The desire of the slothful kills him:* How so? *For his hands refuse to labour*, Prov. 21. 25. He perisheth in his desires.

Impii non curant quærere quem tamen desiderant invenire, cupientes consequi, sed non & secuti. Ber. Eccl. 8.5.

The Believer joyns desires and endeavours together; *One thing have I desired of the Lord, and that I will seek after*, Psal. 27. 4.

3. A mans desire of Grace may be unseasonable: Thus the *foolish Virgins* desired Oyl when it was too late.

The Believers desires are seasonable; he desires Grace in the season of Grace, and seeks in a time when it may be found. *The wise*

wiſe mans heart knows both time and judgment. He knows his ſeaſon, and hath wiſdom to improve it.

The ſilly Sinner doth all his works out of ſeaſon; he ſins away the ſeaſons of grace, and then deſires grace when the ſeaſon is over; the ſinner doth all too late, as *Eſau* deſired the bleſſing when it was too late, and therefore he loſt it; whereas had he come ſooner, he had obtained it. *Sero ſapiunt Phryges.*

Moſt men are like *Ephimetheus*, wiſe too late, they come when the Market is done: when God had ſhut in ſhop, then they have their Oyl to get.

When they lie upon their death-beds, then they deſire Holy Hearts.

4. Deſires of grace in many are very unconſtant and fleeting, like the *morning dew that quickly paſſes away*: Or like *Jonah's Gourd*, that ſprings up in a night, and withers in a night; they have no root in the heart, and therefore quickly periſh: Now then, if a man may deſire grace, but not for graces ſake, if deſires may be without endeavours; if a man may deſire grace when 'tis too late; if theſe deſires may be but fleeting and inconſtant, then may a man deſire grace, and yet be but *almoſt a Chriſtian.* Hoſ. 6. 4. Jon. 4. 6.

6. *A man may tremble at the Word of God, and yet be but almoſt a Chriſtian*, as *Belſhazzar* did at the hand-writing upon the wall. Dan. 5. 6.

Obj. But is not that a note of ſincerity and truth of grace, to tremble at the Word? doth not God ſay, *To him will I look, that is of a poor and contrite ſpirit, and trembles at my Word.* Iſa. 66. 2.

Sol. There is a twofold trembling.

1. One is, when the Word diſcovers the guilt

guilt of sin, and the wrath of God that belongs to that guilt; this where Conscience is awake, causes trembling and amazement; thus when *Paul Preached of Righteousness and Judgment*, it is said *Felix Trembled.*

Act. 24. 25.

2. There is a trembling which arises from a holy dread and reverence of the Majesty of God, speaking in his Word; this is only found in true Believers, and is that which keeps the Soul low in its own eyes. Therefore mark how the words run in *Isa. 66. 2. To him will I look that is of a poor and contrite spirit, and trembles at my Word.*

God don't make the promise to him that trembles at the Word: *For the Devils believe and tremble*; the Word of God can make the proudest, stoutest sinner in the world to shake and tremble, but it is *to the poor and contrite spirit that trembles*: Where trembling is the fruit of a spirit broken for sin, and low in its own Eyes, there will God look.

Jam. 2. 19.

Now many tremble at the word, but not from poverty of spirit, not from a heart broken for sin, and low in its own Eyes; not from a sense of the Majesty and Holiness of God; and therefore notwithstanding they tremble at the word, yet they are but *almost Christians.*

7. *A man may delight in the Word and Ordinances of God, and yet be but almost a Christian:* Isa. 58. 2. *They take delight in approaching to God.*

And it is said of that ground, *Mat.* 13. 20. that it *received the Word with Joy*; and yet it was but stony ground.

Object. But is it not made a Character of a godly man, to delight in the word of God? doth not *David* say, *He is a blessed man that delights in the Law of the Lord?*

Psal. 1. 2.

There

Sol.

There is a delighting in the Word, which flows from Grace, and is a proof of blessedness.

1. He that delights in the word because of its spirituality, he is a Christian indeed; the more Spiritual the Ordinances are, the more doth a Gracious Heart delight in them.

2. When the Word comes close to the Conscience, rips up the Heart, and discovers sin, and yet the Soul delights in it notwithstanding, this is a sign of *Grace*.

3. When delight arises from that Communion that is to be had with God there: This is from a Principle of Grace in the Soul.

But there may be a delight in the Word, where there is no Grace.

1. There are many delight in the Word, because of the Eloquence of the Preacher: they delight not so much in the truths delivered, as in the dress they are delivered in. Thus it is said of the Prophet *Ezekiel*, that he was to them *as a very lovely Song of one that hath a pleasant voice*. Ezek. 33. 32.

2. There are very many delight to hear the word, that yet take no delight to do it; So saith God of them, in *Ezekiel* 33. 22. *They delight to hear my words, but they do them not.* Ezek. 33. 32.

Now then, if a man may delight in the word, more because of the Eloquence of the Preacher, than because of the spiritualness of the matter; if he may delight to hear the Word, and yet not delight to do it: then he may delight in the Word, and yet be but *almost a Christian*.

8. *A man may be a Member of the Church of Christ, he may joyn himself to the People of God, partake with them in all Ordinances;*

and

and share of all Church priviledges, and yet be but almost a Christian.

So the *five foolish Virgins* joyned themselves to the wise, and walked together.

Many may be members of the Church of Christ, and yet not Members of *Christ* the Head of the Church.

There was a mixed multitude came up with the Church of *Israel* out of *Egypt*, they joyned themselves to the *Israelites*, owned their God, left their own Countrey, and yet in heart *Egyptians* notwithstanding.

All are not Israel, that are of Israel, Rom. 9. 6.

The Church in all Ages hath had unsound Members: *Cain* had Communion with *Abel*, *Ishmael* dwelt in the same house with *Isaac*, *Judas* was in fellowship with the Apostles, and so was *Demas* with the rest of the Disciples.

There will be some Bran in the finest Meal: the Draw-net of the Gospel catches bad fish as well as good, the Tares and the Wheat grow together, and it will be so till the harvest.

God hath a Church where there are no Members but such as are true Members of Christ, but it is in Heaven, it is the *Church*
Heb. 12. 23. *of the first born*; there are no Hypocrites, nor rotten unsound Professors, none but the *Spirits of just men made perfect*, all is pure Wheat that God layeth up in that Garner;
Mat. 3. 12. there the Chaff is separated to unquenchable fire.

But in the Church on Earth the Wheat and the Chaff lie in the same heap together, the *Samaritans* will be near of kin to the *Jews* when they are in Prosperity, so while the Church of God flourisheth in the World many

many will joyn to it; they will seem *Jews*, though they are *Samaritans*, and seem Saints though yet they are no better than *Almost Christians*.

9. *A man may have great hopes of Heaven, great hopes of being saved, and yet be but Almost a Christian.*

Indeed there is hope of Heaven which is *the Anchor of the Soul sure and stedfast*, it never miscarries; and it is known by four properties. Heb. 6. 19.

First, It is a hope which purifies the heart, purges out sin, 1 *John* 3. 3. *He that hath this hope, purifies himself even as God is pure.* That soul that truly hopes to enjoy God, truly endeavours to be like God.

Secondly, It is a hope which fills the heart with gladness: *We rejoyce in hope of the glory of God.* Rom. 5. 2. Psal. 130. 5.

Thirdly, It is a hope that is founded upon the Promise: As there can be no true Faith without a Promise, so, nor any true hope: Faith applies the Promise, and Hope expects the fulfilling the Promise; Faith relies upon the Truth of it, and Hope waits for the good of it; Faith gives Interest, hope expects livery and seisin.

Fourthly, It is a hope that is wrought by God himself in the Soul; who is therefore called, *The God of Hope*, as being the *Author* as well as the *Object* of hope. Now he that hath this hope shall never miscarry: This is a right hope; the hope of the true Believer, *Christ in you the Hope of Glory.* Rom. 15. 13. Col. 1. 27.

But then, as there is a true and sound hope, so there is a false and rotten hope; and this is much more common, as bastard pearls are more frequently worn than true Pearls.

There

There is nothing more common, than to see men big with groundless hopes of Heaven: As,

1. A man may have great hope that hath no grace; you read of the hope of Hypocrites, *Job* 8. 13, 14.

The Performance of Duties *is a proof* of their hope; the foolish Virgins would never have done what they did, had they thought they should have been shut out after all.

Many Professors would not be at such pains in duties as they are, if they did not hope for Heaven. Hope is the great motive to action; despair cuts the sinews of all endeavours; that is one reason why the damned in Hell cease acting toward an alteration of their state, because despair hath taken hold of them; if there were any hope in Hell, they would up and be doing there. So that there may be great hope where there is no Grace; experience proves this. formal Professors are men of no Grace, but yet men of great hopes; nay, many times you shall find that none fear more about their eternal condition, than they that have most cause of hope; and none hope more, than they that have most cause of fear. As interest in God may sometimes be without hope, so hope in God may be without Interest.

2. A man may hope in the mercy, and goodness, and power of God, without eying the Promise, and this is the hope of most; God is full of Mercy and Goodness, and therefore willing to save; and he is infinite in power, and therefore able to save; why therefore should I not rest on him?

Now it is presumption, and therefore sin, to hope in the mercy of God, otherwise than by

by eying the Promise; for the Promise is the Channel of Mercy, the Pipe through which it is conveyed; all the blessedness the Saints enjoy in Heaven, is no other than what is the fruit of the Promise relyed on, and hoped for here on Earth. A man hath no warrant to hope in God, but by virtue of the Promise.

3. A man may hope for Heaven, and yet not cleanse his Heart, nor depart from his secret sins; that hope of Salvation that is not accompanied with Heart-purification, that is a vain *hope*.

4. A man may hope for Heaven, and yet be doing the work of Hell; he may hope for Salvation, and yet be working out his own damnation, and so perish in his confidences: This is the case of many, *Malè agendo sperant, & sperando pereunt*; like the Water man that looks one way, and rows another; many have their Eyes on Heaven, whose Hearts are in the Earth; they hope in God, but chuse him not for a portion; they hope in God, but do not love him as the best good, and therefore are like to have no portion in him, nor good by him: but are like to perish without him notwithstanding all their hopes, *Job* 27. 8. *What is the hope of the Hypocrite; though he hath gained, when God takes away his Soul?*

Now then, if a man may have great hope of Heaven, that hath no grace; if he may hope in Mercy, without eying the Promise; if he may hope without Heart purifying: if he may hope for Heaven, and yet do the work of Hell; surely then a man may have great hopes of Heaven, and yet be but *almost a Christian.*

10. *A man may be under great and visible*

changes, and these wrought by the Ministry of the Word, and yet be but almost a Christian, as Mark 6. 20. *Herod* was; it is said when *he heard* John Baptist, *he did many things and heard him gladly. Saul* was under a great change when he met the Lords Prophets, he turned Prophet too.

1 Sam. 10. 10. Nay, it is said, *ver.* 9. of that 1 *Sam.* 10. *that God gave him another Heart.*

Now was not this a work of Grace? and was not *Saul* here truely converted? one would think he was, but yet indeed he was not.

For though it is said, God gave him *another heart*, yet it is not said, that God gave him a *new heart.*

There is a great difference between לֵב אַחֵר (*lebh acher*) another heart, and לֵב חָדָשׁ (*lebh chadash*) a new heart; God gave him another heart to fit him for a Ruler, but gave him not a *new heart* to make him a Believer; another heart may make another man, but it is a *new heart* that makes a new man.

Again, *Simon Magus* is a great proof of this truth: he was under a great and visible change: of a *Sorcerer* he was turned to be a *Believer*, he left his Witchcrafts and Sorceries, and embraced the *Gospel*; was not this a great change?

If the Drunkard doth but leave his Drunkenness, the Swearer his Oaths, the Prophane Person his Prophaneness, they think this is a gracious change, and their state is now good: alas, *Simon Magus* did not only leave his sins, but had a kind of Conversion; Acts 8. 13. for he *believed and was baptized.*

Object. *But is not that man that is changed, a true Christian?*

Not

Not every change makes a man a Christian; indeed there is a change, that whoever is under it, he is a true Christian. *Sol.*

When a mans heart is so changed, as that it is renewed: when old things *are done away, and all is become new*; when the καινὴ κτίσις, the new creature is wrought in the Soul, when a man is *turned from darkness to light, from the power of Satan to God*; when the mind is enlightened, the will renewed, the affections made heavenly, then a man is a Christian indeed. 2 Cor. 5. 17. Acts 26. 18.

But now you must know, that every change is not this change; For,

1. There is a civil change, a moral change, as well as a spiritual and supernatural change.

Many men are changed in a moral sense, and one may say, they are become *new men*, but they are in heart and nature the same men still; they are not changed in a spiritual and supernatural sense, and therefore it cannot be said of them, they are become *new Creatures*.

Restraining Grace may cause a moral change; but it is renewing Grace that must cause a saving change. Now many are under restraining Grace, and so changed morally, that are not under the power of renewing Grace, and so changed savingly.

2. There is an outward change, as well as an inward change; the outward change is often without the inward, though the inward change is never without the outward. A mans heart cannot be sanctified, but it will influence the life, but a mans life may be reformed, and yet never affect or influence the heart.

3. A man may be converted from a course of Prophaneness to a form of Godliness;

from a filthy converſation to a fair profeſſion, and yet the heart the ſame, in one and the other. A rotten Poſt may be gilt without, and yet unſound within. *Hypocrita in verbis ſanctus, in corde vanus; intus Nero, foris Cato. Audi, nemo melius; ſpecta, nemo pejus.*

It is common to have the out-ſide of the
Mat. 23. 25. Cup and Platter made clean, and yet the inſide foul and filthy.

Now then, if a man may be changed morally, and yet not ſpiritually; outwardly, and yet not inwardly; from a courſe of Profaneneſs, to a lifeleſs form of Godlineſs; then a man may be under great and viſible changes, and yet be no more than *almoſt a Chriſtian.*

I do not ſpeak this to diſcountenance any change, ſhort of that that is ſpiritual; but to awaken you to ſeek after that change which is more than moral. It is good to be outwardly reformed, but it is better to be ſavingly renewed.

I know how natural it is for men to take up with any thing like a work of converſion, though it be not converſion, and reſting in that, they eternally periſh.

Beloved, let me tell you, there is no change, no converſion can ſtead your Souls in the day of Judgment, on this ſide that
1. Theſ. 5. 23. ſaving work, which is wrought on the Soul by the Spirit of God, renewing you throughout; the ſober man without this change, ſhall as ſurely go to Hell, as the fooliſh drunkard.

Morality and Civility may commend us to men, but not to God. They are of no value in the procurement of an Eternal Salvation.

A man may go far in an outward change, and yet not be one step nearer Heaven, than he that never was under any change; nay, he may be (in some sense) further off; as Christ saith, *The Scribes and Pharisees were further from Heaven*, with all their shew of Godliness, than *Publicans* and *Harlots* in all their sin and uncleanness. Because resting in a false work, a partial change, we neglect to seek after a true and saving change. There is nothing more common, than to mistake our state, and by overweening thoughts misjudge our condition, and so perish in our own delusions. Mat. 21. 31.

The *World* is full of these *foolish Builders*, that lay the *Foundation* of their *hopes* of *Eternal Salvation upon the Sand*. Mat. 7. 26.

Now my Brethren, would you not mistake the way to Heaven, and perish in a delusion? would you not be found fools at last? for none are such fools as the spiritual fool, who is a fool in the *great* business of *Salvation*. Would you not be fools for your Souls, and for Eternity? O then labour after, and pray for a thorough *work* of *Conversion*, begg of God that he would make a *saving change* in your *Souls*, that *you may be altogether Christians*; all other changes below this *saving change*, this *heart change*, make us but *almost Christians*.

11. *A man may be very zealous in the matters of Religion, and yet be but almost a Christian: Jehu* did not only serve God, and do what he commanded him, but was very zealous in his service, 2 *Kings* 10. 16. *Come with me, and see my zeal for the Lord of Hosts*; and yet in all this *Jehu* was a very Hypocrite. *Joash* was a great reformer in *Jehojadah's* time; it is said, *He did that which was* 2 Chron. 24.

right in the eyes of the Lord, all the days of
v. 17, 18. Jehojadah *the Prieſt*, but when *Jehojadah* died, *Joaſh* his zeal for God died with him, and he becomes a very wretch.

Object. But the Apoſtle makes zeal to be a note of ſound Chriſtianity, *Gal.* 4. 18. *It is good to be zealouſly affected in good things*; nay, it ſeems to be the non-ſuch qualification for
Mat. 11. 12. obtaining Eternal Life, *The Kingdom of Heaven ſuffereth violence, and the violent take it by force.*

Sol. It is true, there is a Zeal which is good, and which renders the Soul highly acceptable to God, a Zeal that never miſſes of Heaven and Salvation.

Now this is a Zeal which is a Cœleſtial fire, the true temper and heat of all the affections to God and Chriſt; *qui non zelat, non amat.* It is a Zeal wrought, and kindled in the ſoul by the Spirit of God, who firſt works it, and then ſets it on work. It is a Zeal that hath the Word of God for its guide, directing it in working, both in regard of its object and end, manner and meaſure. It is a Zeal that checks ſin, and forwards the Heavenly Life. It is a zeal that makes the glory of God its chief end, which
Joh. 2. 17. ſwallows up all by-ends. *The Zeal of thy Houſe hath eaten me up.*

But now all Zeal is not this kind of Zeal; there is a falſe Zeal, as well as a true; every grace hath its counterfeit; as there is fire, which is true Heavenly fire on the Altar, ſo
Lev. 10. 1. there is ſtrange fire: *Nadab and Abihu offered ſtrange fire upon Gods Altar.*

There are ſeveral kinds of Zeal, none of which are true and ſound, but falſe and counterfeit.

I'll inſtance in eight particulars:

First,

First, *There is a blind Zeal*, a Zeal without knowledge, *Rom.* 10. 2. *They have a Zeal* (saith the Apostle) *but not according to knowledge*: Now as knowledge without Zeal is fruitless, so zeal without knowledge is dangerous, it is like wild-fire in the hand of a fool, or like the Devil in the man possess'd, that threw him sometimes into the fire, sometimes into the water; *Zelus absque scientia, quo vehementius irruit, eo gravius corruit.* *Mat.* 17. 15. *Bernard.*

The eye is the light of the body, and the understanding is the light of the Soul: now as the body without the light of the eye, cannot go without stumbling, so the Soul without the light of the mind, cannot act without erring.

Zeal without knowledge, is like an *ignis fatuus* in a dark night, that leads a Traveller out of his way, into the Bogs and Mire. This was the zeal of *Paul*, while he was a *Pharisee*; *I was zealous towards God; as ye all are this day, and I persecuted this way unto the death.* And so *Acts* 26. 9. *I verily thought with my self, I ought to do many things contrary to the name of* Jesus *of* Nazareth: So *Phil.* 3. 6. *Concerning Zeal persecuting the Church.* *Acts* 22. 3, 4.

Such a zeal was that in *John* 16. 2. *They shall put you out of the Synagogue*, (silence you, you shall not be suffered to Preach) *yea the time comes, that whoever kills you, will think that he doeth God service.* This is great zeal, but yet it is blind zeal, and that God abhors.

Secondly, *There is a partial zeal*; in one thing fire-hot, in another key-cold; zealous in this thing, and yet careless in another; Many are first-Table Christians, zealous in the duties of the first Table, and yet neg-

lect the second: thus the *Pharisees* were zealous in their *Corban**, and yet unnatural to their Parents, suffering them to starve and perish. Others are second-Table Christians, zealous in the duties of the second Table, but neglect the first; more for Righteousness among men, than for Holiness towards God. But now he whose Religion ends with the first Table, or begins with the second, he is a fool in his profession, for he is but *almost a Christian.*

* Mat. 23. 23. *Lyra* hath these very words, *Filius per professionem fatuam in religione excusatur a subveniendo parentibus.*

The Woman that was for the dividing the Child, was not the true Mother; and he that is for dividing the Commands, is not a true Believer.

2 Kin. 10. 16. compared with ver. 29. *Jehu* was zealous against *Ahab*'s house, but not so against *Jeroboams Calves*; many are zealous against sins of opinion, that yet use no zeal against the sins of their Conversation.

Now as we know that the sweat of the whole body is a sign of health, but the sweat of some one part only shews a distemper, and therefore Physicians do reckon such an heat to be symptomatical:

Jo. Fernel. de Febribus, l. 4. C. 14.

So where zeal reaches to every Command of God alike, that is a sign of a sound Constitution of Soul; but where it is partial, where a man is hot in one part, and cold in another; that is symptomatical of some inward spiritual distemper.

Thirdly, *There is a misplaced zeal*, fixed upon unsuitable and disproportionable Objects; Many are very zealous in trifling things that are not worth it, and trifle in the things that most require it; like the *Pharisees* that were diligent Tythers of *Mint*, *Anise* and *Cummin*, but neglect the τὰ βαρύτερα τοῦ νόμου, the *weightier matters of the Law*,

Mat. 23. 23.

Law, Judgment, Mercy and Faith. They had no zeal for these, though very hot for the other; many are more zealous for a Ceremony, than for the substance of Religion; more zealous for bowing at the Name of Jesus, than for Conformity to the life of Jesus; more zealous for a holy vestment than for a holy life; more zealous for the inventions of men, than for the institutions of Christ.

This is a superstitious Zeal, and usually found in men unconverted, whom Grace never was wrought in: When was it that *Paul* was so *exceedingly zealous of the traditions of his Fathers*, as he saith, *Gal.* 1. 14. but only when he was in his wretched and unconverted state? as you may see in the next verses; *But when it pleased God to call me by his Grace, then I conferred not with flesh and blood*: *Paul* had another kind of Zeal then, acted by other kind of Principles.

Heathens will rise up in judgment against such men. *Deus non superstitione coli vult, sed pietate*, said *Cicero*. Gal. 1.15,16.

Fourthly, *There is a selfish Zeal*, that hath a mans own ends for its motive; *Jehu* was very zealous, but it was not so much for God, as for the Kingdom; not so much in obedience to the command, as in design to step into the Throne; and therefore God threatens to punish him for that very thing he commands him to do, *Hos.* 1. 4. *I will avenge the blood of* Jezreel *upon the house of* Jehu: Because he shed that blood to gratifie his lust, not to obey God. So *Simeon* and *Levi* pretend great zeal for Circumcision, seem very zealous for the honour of Gods Ordinances, when in truth their Zeal was for Covetousness, and revenge upon the *Shechemites*.

Gen. 34. 14, 15. comp. with v. 25 26, 27, 28, 29. *Ne apretat quisquam ultra videri quam est, ut possit ultra esse quam videtur.*

Fifthly, *There is an outside Zeal*; such was that of the *Scribes* and *Pharisees*, they would

not eat with unwashen hands, but yet would live in unseen sins; they would wash the Cup often, but the heart seldom; paint the out-side, but neglect the in-side: *Jehu* was a mighty out-side reformer, 2 *Kings* 10. 16. But he reformed nothing within, for he had a base heart under all *v.* 31. *Jehu took no heed to walk in the Law of the Lord with all his heart.* Though his fleece was fair, his Liver was rotten.

Our Lord Christ observes of the *Pharisees they pray to be seen of men*; and fast so, *that they may appear to men to fast*, Mat. 6. 5, 16.

Sixthly, *There is a forensick Zeal*, that runs out upon others, like the Candle in the lanthorn, that sends all the heat out of the top, or as the lewd Woman *Solomon* mentions, Prov. 7. 11. whose *feet abide not in her own house.*

Many are hot and high against the sins of others, and yet cannot see the same in themselves; like the *Lamiæ*, that put on their Spectacles when they went abroad, but pulled them off within doors.

Tecum habita. It is easie to see faults in others, and as hard to see them in our selves. *Jehu* was zealous against *Baal* and his Priests, because that was *Ahab*'s sin; but not against the Calves of *Bethel*, because that was his own sin. This zeal is the true Character of an Hypocrite; his own Garden is over-run with Weeds, while he is busie in looking over his Neighbours Pale.

Seventhly, *There is a sinful Zeal*; all the former may be called sinful from some defect; but this I call sinful in a more special notion, because against the life and chief of Religion; it is a zeal against zeal, that flies not at Prophaneness, but at the very power

power of Godliness; not at Error, but at Truth, and is most hot against the most spiritual and important Truths of the Times. Whence else are the Sufferings of Men for the Truth, but from the Spirit of zeal against the Truth? This may be called a devilish Zeal; for as there is the Faith of Devils, so there is the Zeal of Devils, *Therefore his rage is great, because he knows his time is short.* James 2. 19. Rev. 12. 12.

8. There is a *Scriptureless Zeal*, that is not bitted and bounded by the Word, but by some base and low end; Such was *Saul's* Zeal, when God bids him destroy *Amalek. and spare neither man nor Beast*; then, contrary to Gods Command, he spares the best of the *Sheep and Oxen*, under pretence of Zeal *for Gods Sacrifice.* 1 Sam 15. 9.

Another time, when he had no such command, then he slays the *Gibeonites in Zeal to the Children of* Israel *and* Judah. 2 Sam. 21. 2.

Many a mans Zeal is greater then and there, when and where he hath the least warrant from God.

The true Spirit of Zeal is bounded by Scripture; for it is for God, and the concernment of his Glory: God hath no Glory from that Zeal that hath no Scripture warrant.

Now then, if the Zeal of a Man in the things of God may be only a blind Zeal, or a partial Zeal, or a misplaced Zeal, or a selfish Zeal, or an out-side Zeal, or a forensick Zeal, or a sinful Zeal, or a Scriptureless Zeal then it is evident that a man may be very zealous in the matters of Religion, and yet be but *almost a Christian.*

12. *A man may be much in Prayer, he may pray often, and pray much, and yet be but almost a Christian.* Mat. 12. 13.

So

So did the *Pharisees* whom yet our Lord Christ rejects for Hypocrites.

Object. But is not a praying-frame an argument of a sincere heart? are not the Saints of God called, *The generation of them that seek the face of God*, Psal. 24. 6.

Sol. A man is not therefore a Christian, because he is much in Prayer. I grant,

That those Prayers that are from the workings and sighings of Gods Spirit in us; from sincere hearts lifted up to God; from a sense of our own emptiness, and Gods infinite fulness; That are suited to Gods will the great rule of Prayer;

That are for spiritual things, more than temporal;

That are accompanied with Faith and Dependance: Such Prayers speak a man *altogether a Christian.* But now a man may be much in Prayer, and yet be a stranger to such Prayer; As,

1. Nature may put a man upon prayer, for it is a part of natural worship; it may put a Child of God upon prayer; so did Christ, *Mat.* 26. 39, 42. *He went and fell on his face and prayed, saying, O my Father, if it be possible, let this Cup pass from me.* This was a Prayer of Christ, which flowed from the sinless struglings of Nature seeking its own preservation.

2. A man may pray in pretence, for a covering to some sin: so did those devout *Pharisees*, Matthew 23. 14. *Wo to you Scribes and Pharisees, Hypocrites, for ye devour Widdows houses, and for a pretence make long prayers, therefore ye shall receive the greater damnation.* So the *Papists* seem very devout to pray a rich mans Soul out of Purgatory, but it is to cheat the Heir of much of his Estate,

Eſtate, under pretence of praying for his Fathers Soul.

3. A man may pray, and yet love ſin, as *Auſtin*, before *Converſion*, pray'd againſt his *ſin*, but was afraid *God* ſhould hear him, and take him at his word. Now God hears not ſuch prayers, *Pſal.* 66. 18. *If I regard iniquity in my heart, God will not hear my Prayer.*

4. A man may pray much for temporal things, and little for ſpiritual things; and ſuch are the prayers of moſt men, crying out moſt for temporal things: More for, *Who will ſhew us any good?* than for, *Lord, lift upon us the light of thy Countenance.* Pſal. 4. 6. *David* copies out the prayer of ſuch, *Pſalm* 144. 12, *&c. That our Sons may be as planes, and that our Daughters may be as corner-ſtones poliſhed after the ſimilitude of a palace: That our Garners may be full,* &c. *Happy is the people that is in ſuch a caſe.* This is the carnal hearts prayer, and this *David* calls Vanity, *ver.* 11. *They are ſtrange Children, whoſe mouth ſpeaketh Vanity.* and 144. 12. to 16.

5. A man may pray, and yet be far from God in prayer. *This people draw nigh to me with their mouth, and honour me with their lips, but their Heart is far from me,* Matth. 15. 8. A man may pray, and yet have no heart in prayer, and that God chiefly looks at; *My Son, give me thy heart* Iſa. 29. 13. Pro. 23. 26.

The *Jews* have this ſentence written upon the walls of their Synagogues. *Prayer without the intention of the mind, is but a body without a Soul.*

It is not enough to be conſcionable, to uſe Prayer, but we muſt be conſcionable to the uſe of Prayer. Many are ſo conſcientious, that they dare not but pray; and yet

ſo

so irreligious, that they have no heart in Prayer; a common work of God may make a man conscionable to do duties, but nothing less than saving grace in the heart will make a man conscionable in the doing of them.

6. A mans Prayer may be a lie; as a profession without Sanctity, is a lie to the World, so prayer without sincerity, is a lye to God. It is said of *Israel*, that they *sought God, and enquired early after him*: They were much in Prayer, and God calls all but a lye. * *Nevertheless they did flatter him with their mouth, and they lyed to him with their tongues, for their heart was not with him*, ver. 36, 37.

Hearken to my prayer, that goeth not out of feigned lips, saith *David*, Psal. 17. 1.

7. Afflictions and the *pressures* of outward evils, will make a man pray, and pray much, *Psal.* 78. 34. *When he slew them then they sought him, and returned, and enquired early after God.* The Heathen Mariners call every man upon his God when in a storm: when they fear drowning, then they fall to praying, *Jon.* 1. 5. Mariners are for the most part none of the devoutest, nor much addicted to prayer: they will swear twice, where they pray once, and yet it is said, *They cry to the Lord in their Trouble*, Psal. 107. 23, 28. and hence you have a Proverb, *He that cannot pray, let him go to Sea.*

They poured out a Prayer when thy chastening was upon them, Isa. 26. 16.

Now then, if nature may put a man upon Prayer, if a man may pray in pretence, and design, if a man may pray, and yet love sin, if a man may pray mostly for temporal things, if a man may pray, and yet be far

* Psal. 78 34. Some derive the Latin *colo*, to worship, from the Greek κολακεύειν, *to flatter*, and the English word *flatter*, from the Greek word λατρεύειν, *to worship.*

Nuper me amici cujusdam languor admonuit optimos esse nos dum infirmi sumus, Plin. Ep. l. 7

Qui nescit orare, discat navigare.

far from God in Prayer, if Prayer may be a lye, or it may be only the cry of the Soul under affliction; ſure then a man may be much in Prayer, and yet be but *almoſt a Chriſtian.*

But ſuppoſe a man pray, and prevail with God in Prayer, ſurely that is a witneſs from Heaven of a mans ſincerity in Prayer: now I pray, and prevail, I ask and am anſwered. Object.

A man may pray, and be anſwered; for God many times anſwers Prayers in Judgment: As God is ſometimes ſilent in mercy, ſo he ſpeaks in wrath; and as he ſometimes denies Prayer in mercy, ſo he ſometimes anſwers in Judgment; when men are over-importunate in ſomething their Luſts are upon, and will take no nay, then God anſwers in Judgment, *Pſal.* 78. 29. *He gave them their own deſire*: They had deſired Quails, and God ſends them: But now mark the judgment, verſe 30, 31. *While the meat was in their Mouths the wrath of God came upon them, and ſlew them.* Sol.

But ſuppoſe a mans affections are much ſtirred in Prayer, how then? is not that a true note of Chriſtianity? Now my affections are much ſtirred in Prayer. Object.

So was *Eſau*'s when he ſought the Bleſſing; *He ſought it carefully with tears.* A man may be affected with his own Parts in a Duty; while good notions paſs through his Head, and good words through his lips, ſome good motions alſo may ſtrain his Heart; but they are but ſparks which fly out at the Tunnel of the Chimney, which ſuddenly vaniſh; ſo that it is poſſible a man may pray and prevail in Prayer; pray, and be affected in Prayer, and yet be but *almoſt a Chriſtian.* Heb. 12. 17.

13. *A*

13. *A man may suffer for Christ in his Goods, in his Name, in his Person,* and yet be but almost a Christian.

Every man that bears Christs Cross on his shoulders, doth not therefore bear Christ's Image in his Soul.

Object. But doth not our Lord Christ make great promises to them that suffer, or lose any thing for him? Doth not he say, *Mat.* 19.

Mat. 19. 29. 29. *Every one that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or Children, or lands for my Names sake, shall receive an hundred fold, and shall inherit everlasting life?* Sure they are true Christians whom Christ makes this promise to.

Sol. There is a suffering for Christ, that is a

Mat. 5. 10, 11, 12. note of Sincerity, and shall have its reward. That is when a Man suffers for a good cause, upon a good call, and with a good conscience, for Christ's sake, and in Christ's *strength*; when his sufferings are a filling up

Col. 1. 24. *that which is behind of the Sufferings of Christ*; when a man suffers as a Christian, as the Apostle hath it, 1 *Pet.* 4. 6. *If a man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed*;

Mark 14. 28. 29. when a man thrusts not himself into sufferings, but stays Gods call, such suffering is a proof of Integrity.

But now every suffering for Christ, is not suffering as a Christian: For,

1. A Man may suffer for Christ, for that profession of Religion that is upon him; the World hates the shew of Religion; times may come, that it may cost a man as dear to wear the Livery of Christ, as to wear Christ himself. *Alexander* had like to have lost his life for the Gospels sake, *Acts* 19. 33. yet

1 Tim. 1. 19, 20, & 4. 14. he was that *Alexander* (as is generally judged) that afterward made Shipwrack of *Faith*, and

and greatly opposed *Pauls* Ministry.

2. A man may suffer for Christ, and yet have no true love to Christ. This is supposed in 1 *Cor.* 13. 3. *Though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profits nothing.*

Love to Christ is the only noble ground of suffering, but a Man may suffer much upon other ends.

1. Out of opinion of meriting by our suffering, as the Papists: Or,

2. Out of vain glory, or for applause among Professors; some have died that their Names might live: Or, *Vicit amor patriæ, laudisq; immensa cupido.*

3. Out of a *Roman* Resolution, or stoutness of Spirit. Or,

4. Out of a design of profit, as *Judas* forsook all for Christ, hoping to mend his Market by closing with him: Or,

5. Rather to maintain an Opinion, than for Truth's propagation. *Socrates* died for maintaining that there was but one God; but whether he died rather for his own opinion, than for Gods sake, I think it is no hard matter to determine. Thus a man may suffer for professing Christ, and yet suffer upon wrong Principles.

Now then, if a Man may suffer for *Christ*, from the Profession that is upon him, or suffer for *Christ*, and yet not truly love him; then a man may suffer for Christ, and yet be but *almost a Christian.*

14. *A man may be called of God, and embrace this call, and yet be but almost a Christian.* *Judas* is a famous instance of this truth; he was called by Christ himself, and came at the call of Christ, and yet *Judas* was but *almost a Christian.*

But is not the being under the call of God, Object.

God, a proof of our interest in the predestinating love of God? doth not the Apostle say, *Whom he predestinated, them he called?* Rom. 8. 30. Nay, doth he not say in the next Verse, *Whom he called, them he justified?* Nay, doth not God call all whom he intends to save?

Sol. Though God calleth all those that shall be saved, yet all shall not be saved whom God calleth: Every Man under the Gospel is called of God in one sense or other, but yet every man under the Gospel shall not therefore be saved. *For many are called, but few chosen.* Mat. 20. 16.

There is a two-fold call of God. { Internal. External.

1. There is an Internal call of God; Now this call is a special work of the Spirit by the Ministry of the Word, whereby a man is brought out of a state of Nature, into a state of Grace, *out of darkness into light,* from being *vessels of wrath,* to be made *heirs of life.* Act. 26. 18.

I grant, that whoever is under this call of God, is called effectually and savingly, called to be a Christian indeed. *Every man that hath heard and learned of the Father, comes to me.* Joh. 6. 45.

2. There is a call of God which a man may have, and yet not be this call; there is an External call of God, which is by the Ministry of the word.

Now every man that lives under the preaching of the Gospel, is thus called; God calls every soul of you to repent and lay a sure foundation for Heaven and Salvation, by the word you hear this day. Mat. 22. 9.

But now every man that is thus called, is not therefore a Christian: For,

1. Many

1. Many under the call of God, come to Christ, but are not Converted to Christ, have nothing of the Grace and Life of Christ, such as he, *Mat.* 22. who when Christ sent out his servants to bid guests unto the Marriage, came in at the call of Christ, but yet *had not on the Wedding Garment*, ver. 11. that is, had none of the Grace and Righteousness of Jesus Christ.

2. Many that are under the call of the Gospel, come to Christ, and yet afterwards fall away from Christ; as *Judas* and *Demas* did; 2 Tim. 4. 10. It is said when Christ Preached a Doctrine that his Disciples did not like, that *from that time many of his Disciples went back, and walked no more with him.* John 6. 66.

Now then, if many are under this External call of God only, if many that come to Christ, are not converted to Christ, but fall away from Christ; then a man may be called of God, and yet be but *almost a Christian.*

15. *A man may have the Spirit of God, and yet be but almost a Christian.* *Balaam* had the Spirit of God given him when he blessed *Israel*, Num. 24. 2. *Balaam saw* Israel *abiding in Tents, and the Spirit of the Lord came upon him: Judas* had, for by the Spirit he cast out Devils, he was one of them that came to Christ, and said, *Lord, even the Devils are subject to us: Saul* had, 1 *Sam.* 10. 10. *Behold a company of Prophets met him; and the Spirit of God came upon him, and he Prophesied among them.*

But you'l say, *Can a man have the Spirit of God, and yet not be a Christian?* Object. Indeed the Scripture saith, *If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his*; but surely if any man have the Spirit of Christ, he is his. Rom. 8. 9.

There

Sol. There is a having the Spirit, which is a sure mark of Saintship. Where the Spirit is an effectual prevailing Principle of Grace and Sanctification, renewing and regenerating the Heart: Where the Spirit is as a potent worker, *helping the Souls infirmities:* where the Spirit is so as to *abide for ever.* But now every man that hath the Spirit, hath not the Spirit in this manner: For,

Rom. 8. 26. John 14. 16.

1. A man may have the Spirit only transiently, not abidingly; the Spirit may be in a man, and yet not dwell in a man; the Spirit is where-ever he dwells; but he doth not dwell where-ever he is; he is in all, but dwells in Saints only; he is in all *per divinitatis præsentiam*, but dwells in Saints only *per inhabitationis gratiam:* The Hypocrite may have the Spirit for a season, but not to abide in him for ever.

Lomb. 1. sent. dist. 17.

2. A man may have *the Spirit*, and yet not be born of *the Spirit:* Every true Christian is born of *the Spirit*; an Hypocrite may have the Gifts of the Spirit, but not the Graces; the Spirit may be in him by way of *Illumination*, but not by way of *Sanctification*; by way of *Conviction*, but not by way of *Conversion:* Though he may have much common Grace for the good of others, yet he may have no special Grace for the good of himself; though his Profession be Spiritual, yet is his state and condition Carnal.

3. A man may have the Spirit only as a Spirit of Bondage: Thus many have the Spirit working only to Bondage. *The Spirit of Bondage is an operation of the Holy Ghost by the Law, convincing the Conscience of Sin, and of the Curse of the Law, and working in the Soul such an apprehension of the wrath of God, as makes the thoughts of God a terror to him.*

This

This Spirit may be, and often is without saving Grace; this Operation of the Spirit was in *Cain* and *Judas*.

Though none that receive the Spirit of *Adoption*, but they first receive the Spirit of *Bondage*; yet many receive the Spirit of *Bondage*, that never receive the Spirit of *Adoption*.

4. A man may have the Spirit of God working in him, and yet it may be resisted by him: It is said of the *Jews*, *They rebelled and vexed his Holy Spirit*; and the same Sin is charged upon their Children, Acts 7. 51. *Ye stiff-necked, and uncircumcised in heart, ye have always resisted the Holy Ghost; as your Fathers did, so do ye.* The Hypocrite retains not the Spirit so long as to come up to Regeneration and Adoption, but quenches the Motion of it, and thereby miscarries Eternally.

5. A man may have the Spirit, and yet sin that unpardonable Sin: He may have the Holy Ghost, and yet sin the Sin against the Holy Ghost; nay, no man can sin this Sin against it, but he that hath some degree of it.

The true Believer hath so much of the Spirit, such a work of it in him, that he cannot sin that Sin: *He that is born of God sins not*; to wit, *that Sin unto Death*, for that is meant, 1 *John* 5. 16, 17, 18. The carnal Professed Sinner, he cannot sin that Sin, because he is carnal and sensual, having not the *Spirit*. A man must have some measure of the Spirit that sins this Sin; so hath the Hypocrite; he is said to be *Partaker of the Holy Ghost*, Heb. 6. 4. And he only is capable of sinning the Sin against the Holy Ghost. Jude 19.

Now

Now then, if a man may have the Spirit transiently only, not abidingly; if a man may have the Spirit, and yet not be born of the Spirit; if he may have the Spirit only as a Spirit of Bondage; if a man may have the Spirit working in him, and yet it may be resisted by him; if a man may have the Spirit, and yet sin that unpardonable sin against it; then surely a man may have the Spirit of God, and yet be but *almost a Christian.*

16. *A man may have faith, and yet be but almost a Christian: the stony ground* (that is, those hearers set out by the stony-ground) *for a while believed.* It is said, *John* 2. 23. *That Many believed in the Name of Christ, yet Christ durst not commit himself to them.* Though they trusted in Christ, yet Christ would not trust them; and why? *because he knew all men,* verse 24. He knew they were rotten at root, notwithstanding their faith; a man may have all faith, to the removing of *Mountains,* and yet be *nothing.*

Luke 8. 13.

Fides minime fides; quippe ex miraculis nata.

1 Cor. 13.

Object. But how can this be, that a man may have faith, and yet be but *almost a Christian?* Doth not our Lord Christ promise Life Eternal and Salvation, to all that believe? Is not this the Gospel that is to be Preached to every Creature, *He that believes, shall be saved?* Mark 16. 16.

Sol. Though it is true what our Lord Christ saith, that *he that believes shall be saved*; yet is it as true, that many believe that shall never be saved; for *Simon Magus* believed; yea, *James* saith, *The Devils believe and tremble*: Now none will say, these shall be saved.

Jam. 2 19.

As it is true, what the Apostle saith, *All men have not faith*; so it is as true, that

2 Thes. 3. 2.

that there are some men have faith, who are no whit the better for their faith.

You must know therefore there is a two-fold Faith; { *Special and Saving.* / *Common and not Saving.*

1. There is a saving Faith.

This is called *Faith of the operation of God.* Col. 2. 12.

It is a work of Gods own Spirit in the Soul.

It is such a faith, as rests and casts the Soul wholly upon Christ for Grace and Glory, Pardon and Peace, Sanctification and Salvation.

It is an united act of the whole Soul, understanding, will and affections, all concurring to unite the Soul to an all-sufficient Redeemer.

It is such a faith as *purifies the Heart*, and Acts 15. 9. makes it clean, it influences and gives strength and life to all other graces.

Now whoever hath this Faith, is a Christian indeed; this is the *Faith of Gods Elect.* Tit. 1. 1.

But then,

2. There is a common faith, not saving, a fading and temporary Faith; There is the faith of *Simon Magus*, as well as the faith of *Simon Peter*; *Simon Magus* believed, and yet was in the *gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity.* Acts 8. 13. compared with ver. 23.

Now *Simon Magus* hath more followers than *Simon Peter*; the Faith of most men will at last be found to be no better than the Faith of *Simon Magus*: For,

First, The Faith of most is but a *temporary Faith*, it dures for a while, and then dies and perisheth; true and saving Faith, such as is the *Faith of Gods Elect*, cannot die; It may fail in the Act, but not in the Habit;

Habit; The sap may not be in the branch, but it is always in the root.

That Faith that perisheth, that Faith a man may have and perish.

Secondly, There is a Faith that lies only in generals, not in particulars; As there is a general and particular object of Faith, so there is a general and particular Faith. The general Object of Faith is the whole Scripture; the particular Object of Faith is Christ in the Promise.

Now many have a general Faith to believe all the Scripture, and yet have no Faith to make a particular application of Jesus Christ in the Promise.

Devils and Reprobates may believe the Truth of the Scripture, and what is written of the Dying and Suffering of Christ for Sinners; but there are but few that can close up themselves in the Wounds of Christ, and by his Stripes fetch in healing to their own Souls.

Thirdly, There is a Faith that is seated in the Understanding, but not in the Will; this is a very common Faith; many assent to the Truth.

They believe all the Attributes of God, that he is just, holy, wise, faithful, good, merciful, *&c.* but yet they rest not on him notwithstanding.

They believe the Commands are true, but yet do not obey them: They believe the Promises are true, but yet do not embrace and apply them: They believe the Threatnings are true, but yet do not flee from them.

Thus their Faith lies in assent, but not consent; they have Faith to confess a Judgment, but none to take out Execution; by assent they lay a Foundation, but never build upon it by Application.

They

They believe that Christ died to save them that believe, and yet they believe not in Christ, that they may be saved.

O my Brethren, it is not a believing *Head*, but a believing *Heart* that makes a Christian; *with the Heart man believes to Righteousness*; without this our *faith is vain, we are yet in our Sins.* Rom. 10. 10. 1 Cor. 15. 17.

Fourthly, There is a Faith without experience; many believe the Word upon hearsay, to be the Word of God, but they never felt the Power and Virtue of it upon their Hearts and Consciences. Now what good is it to believe the Truth of the Word, if a mans Conscience never felt the Power of the Word? What is it to believe the Truth of the Promise, if we never tasted the sweetness of the Promise?

We are in this case, like a man that believes the description others make of strange Countries, but never travelled them to know the Truth: Or as a Patient that believes all the Physitian says, but yet tries none of his Potions. We believe the Word, because we cannot gainsay it; but yet we have no experience of any saving good wrought by the Word, and so are but *almost Christians.*

Fifthly, There is a Faith that is without brokenness of Heart, that doth not avail to melt or soften the Heart, and therefore is not true Faith; for the least true Faith is ever joyned with a bending Will, and broken Heart.

Sixthly, There is a Faith that transforms not the Heart; Faith without Fruit, that doth not bring forth the new Creature in the Soul, but leaves it in a state of Sin and Death. This is a Faith that makes a man a sound

Professor, but not a sound Believer; he believes the Truth, but not as it is in Jesus; for then it would change and transform him into the likeness of Jesus. He believes that a man must be changed that would be saved, but yet is not savingly changed by believing. Thus while others believe to Salvation, he believes to Damnation, for *his web shall not become a Garment, neither shall he cover himself with his Work.*

Eph. 4. 21.

Isa. 59. 6.

Now then, if a mans Faith may be but temporary, or may lye only in generals, or may be seated in the understanding only, or may be without experience, or may be without a broken heart, or without a new heart; surely then a man may have Faith, he may *taste of this heavenly gift*, and yet be but *almost a Christian.*

Heb. 6. 4.

17. A man may go further yet: He *may possibly have a love to the people of God, and yet be but almost a Christian*; Every kind of love to those who are Saints, is not a proof of our Saintship: *Pharaoh* loved *Joseph*, and advanced him to the second place in the Kingdom, and yet *Pharaoh* was but a wicked man: *Ahab* loved *Jehoshaphat*, and made a League with him, and Married his Daughter *Athaliah* to *Jehoram*, *Jehoshaphat's* Son, and yet *Ahab* was a wicked wretch.

Obj. But you will say, this seems to contradict the Testimony of the Scriptures, for that makes love to the Saints and People of God, a sure proof of our Regeneration, and interest in Life Eternal; 1 *John* 3. 14. *We know that we have passed from Death to Life, because we love the Brethren.* Nay, the Spirit of God putteth this as a Characteristical distinction between Saints and Sinners, in ver. 10. *In this the Children of God are manifest,*

and

and the Children of the Devil; Whosoever doth not righteousness, is not of God, neither he that loveth not his Brother. By Brethren we do not understand *Brethren by place*, those who are of the same Countrey or Nation; such are called Brethren, *Rom.* 9. 3. *Acts* 7. 23, 25. Nor do we understand *Brethren by race*, those who are descended of the same Parents: such are called Brethren *Jam.* 1. 2. But by Brethren we understand *Brethren by Grace*, and supernatural Regeneration, such as are the Children of God; and these are the Brethren whom to love is a sure Sign that we are the Children of God. Phil. 1. 6.

To this I answer, that there is a love to the Children of God, which is a proof of our being the Children of God. *Sol.*

As for instance, when we love them as such, for that very reason, as being the Saints of God; when we love them for the Image of God, which appeareth in them, because of that Grace and Holiness which shineth forth in their Conversations; this is truly commendable, to love the Godly for Godliness sake; the Saints for Saint-ship sake; this is a sure Testimony of our Christianity. The *love of grace* in another, is a good proof of *the life of grace* in our selves: There can be no better evidence of the Spirit of Christ in us, than to love the *Image of Christ* in others. For this is a certain truth, that a Sinner cannot love a Saint as such; An *Israelite* is an abomination to an *Egyptian.* Gen. 3. 15.

There is a contrariety and natural enmity between the two seeds; between the Children of the World, and those whom the Father in his Eternal love hath chosen out of the World. Joh. 15. 19. *Simile simili gaudet.*

It is likeness which is the great ground of love; now there is the highest dissimilitude and unlikeness between an unregenerate sinner, and a Child of God, and therefore a Child of God cannot love a sinner as a sinner; *In whose eyes a vile person is contemned*, Psal. 15. 4. He may love him as a Creature; He may love his Soul, or he may love him under some relation that he stands in to him. Thus God loves the damned Spirits, as they are his Creatures, but as fallen Angels he hateth them with an infinite hatred. So to love a sinner *quatenus* a sinner, this a Child of God cannot do; so neither can a sinner love a Child of God as a Child of God. That he may love a Child of God, that I grant, but it is upon some other consideration; He may love a person that is Holy, not the person for his holiness, but for some other respect. As.

1. A man may love a Child of God for his loving, peaceable, courteous deportment to all with whom he converseth. Religion beautifies the conversation of a man, and sets him off to the eye of the World. The Grace of God is no friend to a morose, churlish, unmannerly behaviour among men, it provokes an affable demeanour and sweetness to all; and where this is found it winneth respect and love from all.

2. A man may love a Saint for his outward greatness and splendor in the World; Men are very apt to honour worldly greatness, and therefore the *rich Saint* shall be loved and honoured, whilst the *poor Saint* is hated and despised. This is as if a man should value the goodness of his Sword by the Imbroidery of his Belt; or his Horse for the beauty of his Trappings, rather than for his strength and swiftness. Tru

Jam. 2. 2, 3.

True love to the *Children of God*, reaches to all the Children of God, poor as well as rich, bound as well as free, ignoble as well as noble, for the Image of Christ is alike amiable and lovely in all.

3. A man may love a Child of God for his fidelity and usefulness in his place; Where Religion in the power of it taketh hold of a mans heart, it makes him true to all his betrustments, diligent in his business, faithful in all his Relations; and this obligeth Respect. A *carnal* Master may prize a *godly* Apprentice or Servant that makes Conscience of pleasing his Master, and is diligent in promoting his *interest*.

I might instance in many things of the like nature, as charity, beauty, wit, learning, parts, *&c.* which may procure love to the people of God from the men of the World. But this love is no proof of Charity: For,

First, It is but a *Natural* love arising from some carnal respect, or self ends; that love which is made by the Scripture an evidence of our Regeneration, *is a Spiritual* love, the principal Loadstone and attractive whereof is Grace and Holiness; It is a love which embraceth *a righteous man in the name of a righteous man.* Col. 1. 8. Mat. 10. 41.

2. A carnal mans love to Saints, is a limited and bounded love; it is not universal, *to the seed*; Now as in sin, he that doth not make Conscience of every Sin, maketh Conscience of no Sin as Sin; so he who doth not love all in whom the Image of *Christ* is found, loveth none for that of the Image of Christ which is found in them. Esth. 10. 3.

Now then, if the love we bear to the People of God may possibly arise from na-

tural love only, or from some carnal respect; or if it be a limited Love, not extended to all the People of God, then it is possible that a man may love the People of God, and yet be no better than *almost a Christian.*

18. *A man may obey the Commands of God, yea many of the Commands of God, and yet be but almost a Christian.* *Balaam* seems very conscientious of steering his course by the Compass of Gods Command: When *Balak* sent to him to come and curse the People of God, saith *Balaam*, *If* Balak *would give me his house full of Silver and Gold, I cannot go beyond the word of the Lord my God*, Numb. 22. 18 and so in the 38 *verse*, saith he, *The word that God putteth in my Mouth, that shall I speak*: The Young man went far in *Obedience*, Mar. 10. 20. *All these have I observed from my Youth up* And yet he was but an Hypocrite, for he forsook Christ after all.

Num 23. 20, 21, 26.

Object. But is it not said, *He that hath my Commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me; and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father; and I will love him, and manifest my self unto him*, Joh. 14 12. And doth not our Lord Christ tell us expressly, *ye are my friends if ye do what I command you*, Joh. 15. 14. And can a man be a friend of Christ, and yet be but *almost a Christian?*

I answer, that there is an obedience to the Commands of Christ, which is a sure proof of our Christianity and Friendship to Christ.

This Obedience hath a three-fold property.

It is { *Evangelical.* *Universal.* *Continual.*

First,

First, It is *Evangelical* Obedience, and that both in matter and manner, ground and end.

In the *Matter of it*; and that is what God requires, *Joh.* 15. 14. *Ye are my Friends, if ye do whatever I command you.*

In the *Manner* of it; and that is according as God requires, *Joh.* 4. 24. *God is a Spirit, and they that worship him, must worship him in Spirit and in Truth.*

In the *Ground* of it; and that is a *pure Heart, a good Conscience, and Faith unfeigned*, 1 Tim. 1. 5.

In the *End* of it; and that is the honour and glory of God; *Whatever ye do, do all to the Glory of God*, 1 Cor. 10. 31.

Secondly, It is an universal Obedience, which extendeth it self to all the Commands of God alike; it respects the Duties of both Tables; Such was the Obedience of *Caleb, who followed the Lord fully*, and of *David*, who had *respect to all his Commands*. Num. 14. 24. Psal. 119. 6.

Thirdly, It is a *continual Obedience*, a putting the hand to Gods Plow without looking back; *I have inclined my heart to perform thy Statutes alway, even to the end*, Psal. 119. 112. *Incipere multorum est, perseverare paucorum.* Bern.

He that thus obeys the command of God, is a Christian indeed, a friend of Christ indeed, but all obedience to the commands of God, is not this obedience. For,

1. There is a partial obedience, a piecemeal Religion, when a man obeys God in one command, and not in another: owns him in one duty, and not in another; When a man seems to make Conscience of the duties of one Table, and not of the duties of another. This is the Religion of most.

Now this obedience is no obedience; for as he that doth not love God, *above all*, doth not

not love God *at all*, so he that doth not obey *all* the commands *universally*, cannot be said to obey any Command *truely*. It is said of those in *Samaria*, that they *feared the Lord, and served their own Gods after their own manner*, 2 Kings 17. 23. And yet in the very next verse it is said, *They feared not the Lord*; So that their fear of the Lord was no fear: In like manner that obedience to God is no Obedience, which is but a partial and piece-meal obedience.

2. A man may obey much, and yet be in his old nature; and if so, then all his obedience in that estate, is but *splendidum peccatum*, a painted sin; *He that offereth an Oblation, is as if he offered Swines blood; and he that burneth Incense, as if he blessed an Idol*, Isa. 66. 3. The nature must be renewed, before the command can be rightly obeyed, for *a corrupt Tree cannot bring forth good fruit*, Mat. 7. 18. Whatever a mans performances are, they cannot be called *obedience*, while the heart remaineth unregenerate, because the *Principle* is false and unsound; every duty done by a Believer, is accepted of God as a part of his obedience to the will of God, though it be done in much weakness; because, though the Believers *hand* is weak, yet his *heart is right*; The hypocrite may have the most *active hand*, But the Believer hath the most *faithful* and *sincere heart*.

Eph. 6. 6.
Rom. 6. 17.

3. A man may obey the *Law*, and yet have no Love to the *Law-giver*: A carnal heart may do the command of God, but he cannot love God, and therefore cannot do it aright, for love to God is the foundation and spring of all true obedience; Every Command of God is to be done in love: this

is

is the *fulfilling of the Law*, Rom. 13. 10. The Apostle saith, *Though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned* (these seem to be acts of the highest obedience) *yet if I have not love, it profits me nothing*, 1 Cor. 13. 3.

4. I might add, that a man may be much in obedience from sinister and base selfish ends, as the *Pharisees prayed much, gave much alms, fasted much*; but our Lord Christ tells us, that it was, *That they might be seen of men, and have glory of men*, Mat. 6. 2, 5, 16. Most of the Hypocrites Piety empties it self into vain glory, and therefore he is but an *empty vine* in all he doth, because *he bringeth forth fruit to himself*, Hos. 10. 1.

It is the end that justifies the action, indeed a good end cannot make a bad action good, but yet the want of a good end makes a good action bad.

Now then if a Man may obey the Commands of God partially, and by halves; if he may do it, and yet be in his natural state; if he may obey the Commands of God, and yet not love God; if the ends of his Obedience may be sinful and unwarrantable; then a man may be much in obeying the Commands of God, and yet be but *almost a Christian.*

19. *A man may be sanctified, and yet be but almost a Christian.* Every kind of Sanctification doth not make a man a new Creature; for many are sanctified that are never renewed. You read in *Heb.* 10. 29. of them that count the *blood of the Covenant wherewith they were sanctified an unholy thing.*

Object. But doth not the Scripture tell us, that *both he that sanctifieth, and they who are sanctified are all one, for which cause he is not asha-*

med to call them Brethren, Heb. 2. 11. And can a man be one with Christ, and yet be but *almost a Christian?*

Sol. To this I answer; You must know there is a twofold work of Sanctification spoken of in Scripture:

The one common and ineffectual.

The other special and effectual.

That work of *Sanctification* which is true and effectual, is a working of the Spirit of God in the Soul, enabling it to the *mortifying* of all Sin, to the obeying of every Command, to walking with God in all well-pleasing.

Rom. 8. 12.

1 Pet. 1. 2.

Heb. 13.

Now whoever is thus sanctified, is one with him that sanctifieth. Christ will not be ashamed to call such Brethren, for they are *flesh of his flesh, and bone of his bone.*

Eph. 5. 30.

But then there is a more common work of Sanctification, which is ineffectual as to the two great works, of dying to Sin, and living to God. This kind of Sanctification may help to restrain Sin, but not to mortifie Sin; it may lop off the Boughs, but it layeth not the Axe to the Root of the Tree; it sweeps and garnishes the *Room* with common Virtues, but doth not adorn it with saving Graces; so that a man is but *almost a Christian*, notwithstanding this Sanctification.

Rom. 6. 11.

Mat. 12. 44.

Or thus; there is an { *Inward* and *Outward* } Sanctification.

Inward Sanctification is that which deals with the Soul and its Faculties, Understanding, Conscience, Will, Memory and Affections. *Outward Sanctification* is that which deals with the Life and Conversation; both these must concur to make a man a Chri-

a Chriſtian indeed; therefore the Apoſtle puts them together in his prayer for the *Theſſalonians*, 1 Theſ. 5. 23. *The God of Peace ſanctifie you wholly, and I pray God your whole Spirit, and Soul, and Body, be preſerved blameleſs unto the coming of our Lord Jeſus Chriſt.* A man is then ſanctified wholly, when he is ſanctified both inwardly and outwardly, both in heart and affections, and in Life and Converſation. Outward Sanctification is not enough without inward, nor inward without outward; we muſt have both *clean hands, and a pure heart*, Pſalm 4. 4. The heart muſt be pure, that we may not incur blame from within; and the hands muſt be clean, that we may not incur ſhame from without; we muſt have hearts *ſprinkled from an evil Conſcience, and bodies waſhed with pure Water. We muſt cleanſe our ſelves from all filthineſs of Fleſh and Spirit*, 2 Corinthians 7. 1. Inward purity is the moſt excellent, but without the outward it is not ſufficient; The true Chriſtian is made up of both.

Non magna munera, ſed immunes manus, menſque ſincera Deo placet.

Heb. 10. 22.

Now many have clean hands but unclean hearts; they *waſh the outſide of the Cup and Platter, when all is filthy within*: Now the former without the latter profiteth a man no more than it profited *Pilate*, who condemned Chriſt, to waſh his hands in the preſence of the People; *Manus abluit & cor polluit*, he waſhed his hands of the blood of Chriſt, and yet had a hand in the death of Chriſt. The *Egyptian* Temples were beautiful on the out-ſide, but within you ſhould find nothing but ſome Serpent or Crocodile. *He is not a Jew which is one outwardly*, Rom. 2. 28. *Judas* was a *Saint* without, but a *Sinner* within; Joh. 6. 70.

openly.

openly a *Disciple*, but secretly a *Devil*.

Some pretend to inward sanctity without outward; this is the pretence of the open sinner: Though I sometimes drop an idle foolish word, saith he, or though I sometimes Swear an Oath, yet I think no hurt, I thank God, my heart is as good as the best; such are like the Sinner *Moses* mentions, that *blessed himself in his heart, saying, I shall have peace, though I walk in the imagination of mine own heart, to add drunkenness to thirst*, Deut. 19. 20.

Some pretend outward sanctity, without inward; such are like the *Scribes* and *Pharisees*, who *outwardly appear righteous unto men, but within are full of hypocrisie and iniquity*; fair Professors, but foul Sinners.

Mat. 23. 28.

Inward Sanctity without *outward*, is *impossible*, for it will reform the life; *outward sanctity* without *inward* is *unprofitable*, for it will not reform the heart; a man is not a true Christian without both; the Body doth not make a man without the Soul, nor the Soul without the Body; both are essential to the Being of a man; so the sanctification of both, are essential to the Being of the *new man*. True sanctification begins at the heart, but works out into the Life and Conversation; and if so, then a man may attain to an outward sanctification, and yet for want of the inward, be no better than *almost a Christian*.

20. And so I shall end this long pursuit of the almost Christian in his progress Heavenward, with this one general conclusion.

A man may do all (as to external duties and worship) that a true Christian can, and when he hath done all, be but almost a Christian.

You must know, all the commands of God

God have an *intra* and an *extra*; there is (as I may ſay) the Body and the Soul of the command.

And accordingly there is an *internal* and an *external* worſhip of God.

Now the *internal* acts of worſhipping of God, are to love God to fear God, to delight in God, to truſt in God, *&c.*

The *external* acts of worſhipping God, are by praying, teaching, hearing, *&c.*

Now there is a vaſt difference between theſe internal and external acts of Worſhip, (and indeed ſuch a difference there is) that they diſtinguiſh the *altogether* from the *almoſt* Chriſtian; the ſincere Believer from the unſound Profeſſor; and indeed in this very thing, the main difference between them doth lye.

1. *Internal* acts of worſhip are good, *propter fieri*; The goodneſs doth adhere intrinſecally to the thing done; a man cannot love God, nor fear God, but it will be imputed to him for a gracious act, and a great part of his holineſs.

But now *External* acts of Worſhip, are not denominated good ſo much from the matter done, *propter fieri*, as from the manner of doing them; a man cannot ſin in loving and delighting in God, but he may ſin in praying and hearing, *&c.* for want of a due manner.

2. *Internal* acts of Worſhip put a goodneſs into *External*; it is our faith, our love, our fear of God, that makes our duties good.

3. They better the heart, and greaten the degrees of a mans holineſs; External duties do not alwayes do this; a man may pray, and yet his heart never the holier; he may hear the word, and yet his heart never

never the softer, but now the more a man fears God, the wiser he is, *Prov.* 1. 7. The more a man loves God, the holier he is: Love is the perfection of holiness, we shall never be perfect in holiness, 'till we come to be perfect in love.

4. There is such an excellency in this *Internal* Worship, that he who mixes it with his *External* duties, is a true Christian when he doth least: But without this mixture, he is but *almost a Christian* that doth most.

Internal Acts of Worship, joyned with outward, sanctifie them, and make them accepted of God, though few; *External* acts of worship, without inward, make them abhorred of God, though they be *never so many.*

So that though the almost Christian may do all those duties in Hypocrisie, which a true Christian doth in sincerity: Nay, though in doing external duties, he may out-do the true Christian, (as the Comet makes a greater blaze than the true Star: If *Elijah* fast and mourn, *Baal*'s Priests will cut their Flesh) yet he cannot do those *internal* duties that the meanest true Christian can.

The almost Christian can pray, but he cannot love God; he can teach or hear, *&c.* but he cannot take delight in God.

Job 27. 10. This is *Christianorum propria virtus. Hæc propria est delectationis materia, si cum habeas quæ desideraveris perfruaris:* Pined. in loc.

Mark *Job*'s query concerning the Hypocrite: *Will he delight himself in the Almighty?*

He will *Pray* to the *Almighty*, but *will he delight himself in the Almighty?* will he take pleasure in God?

Ah no! he will not, he cannot.

Delight in God ariseth from a suitableness between the faculty and the object; now

now none more unſuitable than God and a carnal heart.

Delight ariſes from the having what we deſire, and from enjoying what we have: How then can he delight in God, that neither enjoyeth, nor hath, nor truely deſireth God?

Delight in God is one of the higheſt exerciſes of Grace; and therefore how can he delight in God, that hath no Grace?

Why then ſhould any Saint of God be diſcouraged, when he hears how far the *almoſt Chriſtian* may go in the way to Heaven, when as he that is the weakeſt true Believer, that hath the leaſt true Grace goes farther than he, for he believes in, and loves God.

Should the *Almoſt Chriſtian* do leſs (as to matter of external Duties) yet if he had but the leaſt true Faith, the leaſt ſincerity of Love to Chriſt, he would ſurely be ſaved; and ſhould the true Chriſtian do ten times more Duties than he doth, yet, had he not Faith in Chriſt, and love to Chriſt, he would ſurely be rejected.

Oh therefore, let not any weak Believer be diſcouraged, though Hypocrites may out-do them, and go beyond them in duty; for all their duties are done in Hypocriſie; but your Faith and Love to God in Duties, is a proof of your Sincerity.

1. I do not ſpeak this to diſcourage any Soul in the doing of Duties, or to beat down outward *Performances*, but to rectifie the Soul in the *doing of them*.

As the Apoſtle ſaith, *Covet earneſtly the beſt gifts; but yet I ſhew you a more excellent way*; So I ſay, covet the beſt Gifts, covet much to be in Duties, much in Prayer, much in. 1 Cor. 12. 32.

in hearing, &c. *But yet I shew you a more excellent way*, and that is, the way of Faith and Love; pray much, but then believe much too. Hear much, read much, but then love God much too. Delight in the Word and Ordinances of God much, but then delight in the God of Ordinances more.

And when you are most in duties, as to your use of them; Oh then be sure to be above duties, as to your resting and dependance upon them. Would you be Christians indeed, altogether Christians? O then, be much in the use and exercise of Ordinances, but be much more in Faith and dependance upon Christ and his Righteousness; when your Obedience is most *to the command*, then let your Faith be most upon the *Promise*.

The Professor rests in his Duties, and so is but *almost a Christian*; but you must be sure to rest upon the Lord Christ; this is the way to be *altogether Christians*; for, *if ye believe, then are ye* Abraham's *Seed, and Heirs according to the Promise*.

And thus I have answered the first Query; to wit, How far a man may go in the way to Heaven, and yet be but *almost a Christian*.

1. He may have much Knowledge.
2. He may have great Gifts.
3. He may have a high Profession.
4. He may do much against Sin.
5. He may desire Grace.
6. He may tremble at the Word.
7. He may delight in the Word.
8. He may be a Member of the Church of Christ.
9. He may have great hopes of Heaven
10. He may be under great and visible changes.

11. He

11. He may be very zealous in the matters of Religion.

12. He may be much in Prayer.

13. He may ſuffer for Chriſt.

14. He may be called of God.

15. He may in ſome ſenſe have the Spirit of God.

16. He may have ſome kind of Faith.

17. He may love the People of God.

18. He may go far in obeying the Commands of God.

19. He may be in ſome ſenſe ſanctified.

20. He may do all (as to external duties) that a true Chriſtian can, and yet be no better than *almoſt a Chriſtian.*

The Second Queſtion.

Why, or whence is it, that many men go ſo far, as that they come to be almoſt Chriſtians?

Firſt, *It may be to anſwer the call of Conſcience*; though few men have Grace, yet all men have Conſcience.

Now do but obſerve, and you ſhall ſee how far Conſcience may go in this work.

1. *Conſcience owns a God, and that this God muſt be worſhipped and ſerved by the Creature.* Atheiſts in practice we have many, ſuch as the Apoſtle ſpeaks of, *Tit.* 1. 16. *They profeſs they know God, but in works they deny him.*

But Atheiſts in Judgment none can be; *Tully* a Heathen, could ſay, *Nulla gens tam barbara*, &c.

Now there being ſuch a light in Conſcience as to diſcover that there is a God, and that he muſt be worſhipped by the help of farther light, the light of the Word; a man may be enabled to do much in the ways of God, and yet his Heart without a dram of Grace.

2. Know this, that *natural Conſcience is capable*

ble of great improvements from the means of grace; sitting under the Ordinances, may exceedingly heighten the endowments of Conscience, though they do not sanctifie Conscience; it may be much regulated, though it be not all renewed; it may be *enlightned, convinced*, and yet never *savingly converted and changed*.

Ye read in *Heb.* 6. 4. of some that were *once enlightned, and tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made Partakers of the Holy Ghost*. What work shall we call this? It could not be a saving work, a true change and Conversion of state; for notwithstanding this enlightning, and tasting, and partaking, yet they are here said to *fall away*, verse 6.

Had it been a true work of Grace, they could never have fallen away from that; a Believer may fall, but he cannot fall away; he may fall foully, but he can never fall finally, for *underneath are the everlasting Arms*; his Faith is established in the strength of that Prayer of Christ, that our Faith fail not; nay, he tells us expresly, that it is eternal life which he gives from which we shall *never perish*, John 10 28.

Deut. 33. 27.

Luke 22. 32.

This work then here spoken of, cannot be any saving work, because it is not an abiding work; for they that are under it, are said to fall away from it; but though it be not a saving work, yet it is a supernatural work; it is an improvement made by the word upon the Consciences of men through the power of the Spirit; and therefore they are said to *taste the good Word of God*, and to be made *Partakers of the Holy Ghost*; they have not the Spirit abiding in them savingly, but striving with them, and working upon them convincingly, to the awakening, and setting Conscience

ſcience on work. And Conſcience thus ſtirred, may carry a man very far in Religion, and in the Duties of the Goſpel, and yet be but a natural Conſcience.

A common work of the Spirit, may ſtead a man very much in the Duties of Religion, though it muſt be a ſpecial work of the Spirit that ſteads a man to Salvation; a man may have the aſſiſting preſence of the Spirit, enabling him to preach and pray, and yet he may periſh for want of the renewing preſence of the Spirit enabling him to believe: *Judas* had the former, and yet periſhed for want of the latter; he had the Spirit aſſiſting him to caſt out Devils, but yet he had not the Spirit renewing him, for he was caſt out himſelf. Thus a man may have an improved Conſcience, and yet be a ſtranger to a renewed Conſcience; and Conſcience thus improved, may put a man very much upon Duty.

I pray God none of us miſtake a *Conſcience* thus improved by the *Word*, for a *Conſcience* renewed by the Spirit, the miſtake is very eaſie, eſpecially when a Life of Duties is the Fruit of it.

3. *The Conſcience of a natural man is ſubject to diſtreſs and trouble*; though a natural *Conſcience* is not *ſanctified* with Grace, yet it is often troubled at ſin; trouble of Conſcience is not incident to *Believers* only, but ſometimes to *Unbelievers* alſo. A *Believers* Conſcience is ſomtimes troubled when his ſin is truely pardoned; and a natural mans Conſcience is troubled for ſin, though it is never freed from ſin. God ſometimes ſets the Word home upon the ſinners Conſcience, and applies the terrors of the Law to it, and this fills the Soul with fear and horror of Death and Hell;

now

now in this case the soul usually betakes it self to a life of duties; meerly to fence trouble out of Conscience.

2 Sam. 14. 30, 31. When *Absalom* sets fire on *Joab*'s Cornfields, then he runs to him, though he refused before: so when God lets a spark of Hell, (as it were) fall upon the sinners *Conscience*, in applying the terrors of the Word; this drives the sinner to a life of duties, which he never minded before. The ground of many a mans engaging in Religion, is the trouble of his Conscience; and the end of it is continuing in Religion, is the quieting of Conscience; if Conscience would never check him, God should never hear from him.

Natural Conscience hath a voice, and speaks aloud many times in the sinners ears, and telleth him, this ought not to be done, God must not be forgotten, the *Commands of God*, ought not to be slighted; living in sin will be the ruine of the soul; and hence it is that a natural man runs to duties, and takes up a lifeless and graceless profession, that he may thereby silence Conscience. As a man sick in his stomach, whatever sweet morsel he hath eaten, he brings up all; and although it was sweet in the eating, yet it is bitter in the rising:

So it fareth with the sinner, when he is Sermon-sick, or Conscience-sick; though his sin was *sweet* in the practice, yet the thought of it riseth bitter upon the Conscience, and then his profession of Religion is the Pill he rolleth about in his mouth, to take away the bitterness of sins taste.

4. *Natural Conscience enlightned by the Word, may discover to a man much of the misery of a natural state*; though not effectually to bring him out of it, yet so as to make him restless and

and weary in it; it may shew a sinner his nakedness, and hereupon the soul runneth to a life of *duties*, thinking hereby to stead the misery of his case, and to make a covering for his nakedness. It is said *Genesis* 3. 7. That when *Adam* and *Eve saw they were naked, they sowed fig-leaves together, and made themselves a covering.* So when once the sinner seeth his nakedness and vileness, by reason of sin, whereas he should run to Christ, and close with him, and beg his righteousness for a covering, *that the shame of his nakedness doth not appear*, Rev. 3. 18. He rather runneth to a life of duties and performances, and thus maketh himself a covering with the *fig-leaves* of *a profession* without *Christ* truely embraced, and Conscience at all renewed. Natural man would fain be his own Saviour, and supposeth a change of state to be a thing within his own power, and that the true work of grace lieth in leaving off the practice of sin, and taking up a life of duties, and therefore upon this principle doth many a graceless professor out-strip a sound Believer; for he resteth in his own performances, and hopeth these will commend him to God.

Quest. *If a natural Conscience may go thus far, then what difference is there between this natural Conscience in Hypocrites and Sinners, and a renewed Conscience in believers? Or how may I know whether the working of my Conscience be the working of nature only, or else of grace wrought in it?*

Sol. I grant, that it is difficult to distinguish between the one and the other; and the difficulty hath a two-fold rise.

1. It ariseth from that Hypocrisie that is in the best Saints, the weakest believer is no *Hypocrite*, but yet there is some *Hypocrisie* in the

the strongest Believer; where there is *most grace*, there is *some sin*; and where there is *most sincerity*, yet there is *some hypocrisie*.

Now it is very incident to a tender Conscience to misgive and mistrust its state upon the sight of any sin; when he sees hypocrisie break out in any duty or performance, then he complains, *Surely my aims are not sincere, my Conscience is not renewed; it is but natural Conscience enlightned, not by Grace purged and changed.*

Pigmalion made an Image so *lively*, that he deceived himself, and taking the Picture for a Person, fell in Love with the Picture.

2. It ariseth from that resemblance there is between *grace* and *hypocrisie*, for *hypocrisie* is a resemblance of grace without substance, the likeness of *grace* without the life of grace. There is no grace, but an hypocrite may have somewhat like it; and there is no duty done by a Christian, but an hypocrite may outstrip him in it. Now when one that hath not true grace shall go farther than one that hath, this may well make the Believer question whether his grace be true or not; or whether the workings of his Conscience be not the workings of nature only, rather than of Grace wrought in it.

But to answer the question; You may make a judgment of this in these seven particulars.

1. *If a natural mans Conscience putteth him upon Duty, he doth usually bound himself in the work of God*: His duties are limited, his obedience is a limited obedience; he doth one duty, and neglecteth another; he picketh and chuseth among the Commands of *God*; obeyeth one, and slighteth another. Thus much is enough, what need any more? if I do thus and thus, I shall go to Heaven at last.

But now where Conscience is renewed by Grace, there it is otherwise; though there may

may be many weaknesses which accompany its duties, yet that Soul never bounds it self in working after God; it never loves God so much, but still it would love him more, nor seeks him so much, but still it would seek him more; nor doth it serve God so well at any time, but still it makes Conscience of serving him better. *A renewed Conscience is a spring of universal Obedience*, Psal. 119. 128. for it seeth an infinite excellency and goodness, and holiness in God, and therefore would fain have its service rise up toward some proportionableness to the Object; a God of infinite excellency and goodness should have infinite love, saith Conscience; a holy God should have service from a holy Heart, saith Conscience. Psal. 119. 20.

Now then, if I set bounds to my love to God, or to my service to God; if I limit my self in my obedience to the holy God; love one Command, and slight another; obey in one point and yet lie cross in another; then is all I do but the working of a natural Conscience. But on the other hand, if I love the Lord with my whole Heart, and whole Soul, and serve him with all my might and strength: *If I esteem all Gods precepts concerning all things, to be right, and have respect to all thy commands*, then is my love and service from a renewed conscience. Mat. 22. 37. Mark 12. 33.

2. *If a natural mans Conscience check or accuse for sin, then he seeketh to stop the mouth of it, but not to satisfie it*; most of the natural mans duties are to still and stifle Conscience.

But now the Believer chuseth rather to let Conscience cry, than to stop the mouth of it, until he can do it upon good terms, until he can fetch in satisfaction to it, from the blood of Jesus Christ, by fresh acts of faith apprehended and applied. The

The natural man seeketh to still the noise of conscience, rather than to remove the guilt, the Believer seeketh the removal of guilt by the application of *Christs blood*, and then conscience is quiet of it self. As a foolish man having a mote fallen into his eye, and making it water, he wipeth away the water, and labours to keep it dry, but never searcheth his eye to get out the Mote; but a wise man mindeth not so much the wiping, as the searching his eye; somewhat is got in, and that causeth the watering, and therefore the cause must be removed.

Now then, if when conscience accuseth for sin, I take up a life of duties, a form of godliness, to stop the mouth of conscience, and if hereupon conscience be still and quiet, then is this but a natural conscience; but if when conscience checks, it will not be satisfied with any thing but the *blood of Christ*, and therefore I use duties to bring me to Christ, and if I beg the *sprinkling* of his *blood* upon Conscience, and labour not so much to stop the mouth of it, as to remove guilt from it, then is this a renewed Conscience.

3. *There is no natural man, let him go never so far, let him do never so much in matters of Religion but still he hath his* Dalilah, *his bosom lust.*

Joh. 12. 6. *Judas* went far, but he carried his covetousness along with him; *Herod* went far, *he hid*
Mark 6. 20. *many things* under the force of *John*'s Ministery, but yet there was one thing he did not; he did not put away his Brothers Wife; his
ver. 17, 18. *Herodias* lay in his bosom still. Nay, commonly, all the natural mans duties are to hide some sin, his profession is only made use of for a *cover-shame*.

Psal. 119. 128. But now the renewed Conscience hateth all sin, as *David* did, *I hate every false way*; he

he *regardeth no iniquity in his heart*; he useth duties, not to cover sin, but to help to work down, and work out sin. Psal. 66.18.

Now then, if I profess Religion, if I make mention of the name of the Lord, *and make my boast of the Law, and yet through breaking the Law dishonour God*: If I live in the love of any sin, and make use of my Profession to cover it, then am I an *Hypocrite*, and my duties flow but from a natural Conscience: But on the other hand, *If I name the name of the Lord Jesus*, and withal *depart from iniquity*; if I use duties not to cover, but to discover and mortifie sin, then am I upright before God, and my duties flow from a renewed Conscience. Rom. 2. 2. 2 Tim. 2. 19.

4. *A natural man prides himself in his duties*; if he be much in duty, then he is much lifted up under duty: so did the *Pharisees*, Luke 18. *God I thank thee that I am not as other men are*; and why? where lay the difference? why, *I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all*, &c. Luke 18. 11, 12.

But now, take a gracious heart, a renewed Conscience, and when his duties are at highest, then is his heart at lowest. Thus it was with the Apostle *Paul*, he was much in service, *in season, and out of season*, Preaching up the Lord Jesus with all boldness and earnestness, and yet very humble in a sense of his own unworthiness under all: *I am not worthy to be called an Apostle*, 1 Cor. 15. 9. *To me who am less than the least of all Saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ*, Eph. 3. 8. And again, 1 *Tim.* 1. 15. *Of sinners I am chief*. Thus a Believer, when he is highest in duties, then is he lowest in humility; duty puffeth up the Hypocrite, but a Believer 2 Tim. 4. 2.

comes away humbled; and why? because the hypocrite hath had no visions of God; he hath seen only his own gifts and parts and this exalteth him; but the Believer hath seen God and enjoyed Communion with God, and this humbleth him: Communion with God, though it be very refreshing, yet it is also very abasing and humbling to the Creature. *Hierom* observeth on *Zeph.* 1. 1. where it is said, that *Cushi* was *the Son of* Gedaliah, *the Son of* Amariah; That *Amariah* signifieth *the word of the Lord*, *Gedaliah* signifieth *the greatness of the Lord*, and *Cushi* is interpreted *humility* or my *Æthiopian*. So that saith he, *from the Word of the Lord*, cometh a sight of the *greatness of the Lord*, and from a sight of the *greatness of the Lord*, cometh *humility*.

Now then, if I pride my self in any duty, and am puffed up under my performances, then have I not seen nor met with God in any duty. But on the other hand, if when my gifts are at highest, my heart is at lowest; if when my Spirit is most raised, my heart is then most humbled; if in the midst of all my services, I can maintain a sense of my own unworthiness; if *Cushi* be the Son of *Gedaliah*, then have I seen and had Communion with God in duty, and my performances are from a renewed Conscience.

5. *Look what that is to which the heart doth secretly render the glory of a duty, and that is the principle of the duty*: in *Hab.* 1. 16. ye read of them that *Sacrifice to their Net, and burn incense to their drag*; where the glory of an *action* is rendred to a mans self, the principle of that action is self: all *Rivers* run into the *Sea*, that is an *argument* they came from the *Sea*; so when all a mans duties *terminate* in self,

Eccles. 1. 7.

self, then is self the principle of all.

Now all the natural mans duties run into himself; he was never by a through work of grace truly cast out of himself, and brought to deny himself, and therefore he can rise no higher than himself in all he doth; he was never brought to be *poor in Spirit*, and so to live upon another; to be carried out of all duties to Jesus Christ.

But the Believer giveth the glory of all his services to God; whatever strength or life there is in duty. God hath all the glory; for he is by grace outed of himself, and therefore seeth no excellency or worthiness in self. Psal. 115. 1

I laboured more abundantly than they all, saith the Apostle; but to whom doth he ascribe the glory of this? to self? No, *yet not I*, saith he, *but the grace of God which was with me*, 1 Cor. 15. 10. Whenever the grace of Christ is wrought in the heart as a principle of duty, you shall find the Soul when it is most carried out with a *yet not I*, in the mouth of it, *I live, yet not I*; *I laboured more abundantly than all*; *yet not I*; self is disclaimed, and Christ most advanced, when it is from Grace that the heart is quickened; the *twenty four Elders cast their Crowns at Christs feet*, Rev. 4. 10. Gal. 2. 20.

There are two things very hard; one is to take the shame of our sins to our selves; the other is to give the glory of our services to Christ.

Now then, *If I sacrifice to my own Net*, if I aim at my own credit or profit, and give the glory of all I do to self, then do I sow to the flesh, and was never yet cast out of self, but act only from a natural Conscience; but if I give the glory of all my strength and Gal. 6. 8.

life in duty only to God, if I magnifie grace in all, and can truly say in all I do, *yet not I*, then am I truly cast out of self, and do what I do with a renewed Conscience.

6. *Though a natural Conscience may put a man much upon service, yet it never presseth to the attainment of holiness*; so that he carrieth an unsanctified heart under all; how long was *Judas* a professor, and not one dram of grace that he had got? *The foolish Virgins* (you know) *took the Lamps, but took no Oyl in their Vessels*; that is, they looked more after a profession, than after sanctification. Mat. 25. 3.

But now when a renewed Conscience putteth a man upon duty, it is succeeded with the growth of holiness; as grace helpeth to the doing of duty, so duty helpeth to the growing of grace; a believer is the more holy, and the more heavenly, by his being much in duties.

Now then, if I am much in a life of duties, and yet a stranger to a life of holiness; if I maintain a high profession, and yet have not a true work of sanctification; if (like Children in the Rickets) I grow big in the head, but weak in the feet, then have I gifts and parts, but no grace; and though I am much in service, yet have I but a natural Conscience; but on the other hand, if the holiness of my conversation carrieth a proportion to my profession; If I am not a *hearer of the word only*, but a *doer of it*; if grace groweth in seasons of duty, then I do act in the things of God from a renewed Conscience.

7. And lastly, *If a natural Conscience be the spring of duty, why then this spring runs fastest at first, and so abateth, and at last drieth up*: but if a renewed Conscience, a sanctified Heart be

be the ſpring of duty, then this ſpring will never dry up, it will run always from firſt to laſt, and run quicker at laſt than firſt. *I know thy works, and the laſt to be more than the firſt*, Rev. 2. 19. *The righteous ſhall hold on his way, and he that hath clean hands ſhall be ſtronger and ſtronger*, Job 17. 9.

Queſt.

But you will ſay, Why doth that man abate and languiſh in his duties, that doth them from a natural Conſcience, more than he that doth them from a renewed Conſcience?

Anſw.

The reaſon is, becauſe they grow upon a failable root, a decaying root, and that is nature; nature is a fading root, and ſo are all its fruits fading; but the Duties done by a renewed Conſcience, are fruits that grow upon a laſting root, and that is *Chriſt*; *Gifts have their root in Nature, but Grace hath its root in Chriſt*, and therefore the weakeſt Grace ſhall out-live the greateſt Gifts and Parts, becauſe there is life in the root of the one, and not in the root of the other; Gifts and Grace differ like the Leather of your Shoe, and the Skin of your Foot: Take a pair of ſhoes, that have the thickeſt Soles, and if you go much in them, the Leather weareth out, and in a little time a mans foot cometh to the ground; but now a man that goeth barefoot all his days, the Skin of his feet doth not wear out; why ſhould not the Sole of his foot ſooner wear out than the Sole of his ſhoe, for the Leather is much thicker than the Skin? the reaſon is becauſe there is life in the one, and not in the other; there is life in the Skin of the foot, and therefore that holdeth out, and groweth thicker and thicker, harder and harder; but there is no life in the Sole of his ſhoe, and there-

fore that weareth out, and waxeth thinner and thinner; so it is with Gifts and Grace.

Now then, if I decay and abate, and grow weary of a Profession, and fall away at last; if I begin in the spirit, and end in the flesh; then was all I did from a *natural Conscience*: but if I grow and hold out, if I *persevere to the end, and my last works be more than my first*; then I act from a *renewed Conscience*.

And thus I have in seven things answered that question; *viz.* if Conscience may go thus far in putting a man upon duties, then what difference is there between this natural Conscience in Hypocrites and Sinners, and renewed Conscience in Believers?

And that is the first Answer to the main Query; *viz.* *Whence is it that many men go so far, as that they come to be almost Christians?*

It is to answer the *call of Conscience*.

Secondly; *It is from the power of the Word under which they live*; though the Word does not work effectually upon all, yet it hath great power upon the hearts of sinners to reform them, though not to renew them.

1. It hath *vim discriminationis*, a discerning, discovering power, *Heb.* 4. 12. *The Word of God is quick and powerful, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joynts and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.* This is the glass where every man may see what manner of man he is; as the light of the Sun discovers the little Motes, *Eph.* 1. 23. so the light of the Word shining into Conscience, discovers little sins.

2. The Word hath *vim legislativam*, the power of a Law; it gives Law to the whole Soul, binds Conscience; it is therefore frequently called the Law in Scripture; *Un-*

thy Law had been my delight, &c. *To the Law, and to the Testimony*; this is spoken of the whole Word of God, which is therefore called a Law, because of its binding power upon the Conscience. Psal. 119. 29. Isa 8. 20.

3. It hath *vim judicativam*, a judging power, *Joh.* 12. 48. *The word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him at the last day*; the Sentence that God will pass upon Sinners hereafter, is no other than what the Word passeth upon them here: The judgment of God, is not a day wherein God will pass any new Sentence, but it is such a day wherein God will make a solemn publick ratification of the Judgment passed by the Ministry of the Word upon Souls here; this I gather clearly from *Mat.* 18. 18. *Whatsoever ye shall bind on Earth shall be bound in Heaven, and whatsoever ye shall loose on Earth, shall be loosed in Heaven*; so that by bringing a mans heart to the Word, and trying it by that, he may quickly know what that sentence is that God will pass upon his Soul in the last day; for as the Judgment of the Word is now, such will the judgment of God be concerning him at the last day.

Indeed there is a twofold power further than this, in the Word.

It hath { *Vim Plasticam*, and *Vim Salvificam*.

A begetting and saving power; but this is put forth only upon some.

But the other is more extensive, and hath a great causality upon a profession of goodness, even among them that have no grace.

A man that is under this threefold power of discerning Law and Judgment, that hath his heart *ransacked* and discovered, his Conscience *bound* and *awed*, his state and sinful

condition *judged* and *condemned*, may take up a resolution of a new life, and convert himself to a great Profession of Religion.

Thirdly; *A man may go far in this course of profession from affectation of applause and credit, and to get a name in the World*, as it is said of the *Pharisees*, *They love to pray in the Market-places, and in the corners of the streets, to be seen of men.* Mat. 6. 6.

Many are of *Machiavels* principle, that the appearance of virtue is to be sought; because though the use of it is a trouble, yet the credit of it is a help.

Jerome in his Epistle to *Julian*, calls such, *popularis auræ vilia mancipia*, the base *bond-slaves* of common Fame. Many a man doth that for credit, that he will not do for conscience; and owns *Religion* more for the sake of *lust*, than for the sake of Christ; thus making *God*'s stream to turn the *Devil's Mill.*

Fourthly; *It is from a desire of Salvation:* There is in all men a desire of Salvation; it is natural to every being, to love and seek its own preservation; *Who will shew us any good? Psal.* 4. 6. This is the Language of Nature, seeking happiness to its self.

Many a man may be carried so far out in the desires of Salvation, as to do many things to obtain it.

So did the *young man*, *Good Master, what good thing shall I do, that I may inherit eternal life?* He went far, and did much, obeying many commands, and all out of a desire of Salvation. So then, put these together, and there is an answer to that question.

The call of Conscience,
The power of the Word,
The affectation of Credit: And,
The desire of Salvation.

These

These may carry a man so far as to be almost a Christian.

The third Question propounded, is this:

Thirdly; *Whence is it that many are but almost Christians, when they have gone thus far? what is the cause of this?* Quest.

I might multiply answers to this Question; but I shall instance in two only, which I judge the most material. Answ.

First; *It is for want of right and sound Conviction:* If a man be not throughly convinced of sin, and his heart truly broken, whatever his Profession of Godliness may be, yet he will be sure to miscarry; every work of conviction is not a through work; there are convictions that are only natural and rational, but not from the powerful work of the Spirit of God.

Rational Conviction, *is that which proceeds from the working of a natural conscience, charging guilt from the light of nature, by the help of those κοιναι ἐννοιαι, those common principles of reason that are in all men.* This is the conviction you read of, *Rom.* 2. 14, 15. It is said, that the *Gentiles* who had not the Law, yet had their *consciences bearing witness, and accusing, or excusing one another*; though they had not the *light of Scripture*, yet they had convictions from the *light of Nature*: Now by the help of the Gospel-light, these convictions may be much improved, and yet the heart not renewed. Rational Conviction what?

But then there is a spiritual Conviction; and this is that work *of the Spirit of God upon the Sinners heart by the Word, whereby the guilt and filth of sin is fully discovered, and the woe and misery of a natural state distinctly set home upon the conscience, to the dread and terrour of the Sinner, whilst he abides in that state and condition.* Spiritual Conviction what?

And this is the Conviction that is a sound and through work: Many have their Convictions, but not this *spiritual Conviction.*

Query. Now you'l say, *Suppose I am at any time under Conviction, how shall I know whether my Convictions be only from a natural Conscience, or whether they be from the Spirit of God?*

Answ. I should digress too much to draw out the Solution of this Question to its just length; I shall therefore in five things only lay down the most considerable difference between the one and the other.

1. *Natural Convictions reach chiefly to open and scandalous Sins*, sins against the light of Nature; *for natural Conviction can reach no farther than natural light.*

But *spiritual Convictions* reach to *secret, inward and undiscerned* sins, such as *Hypocrisie, Formality, Lukewarmness, Deadness, and Hardness of Heart, &c.*

Observe then, whether your Trouble for sin looks *inward* as well as *outward*; and reaches not only to open sins, but to secret lusts, to inward and spiritual sins; and if so, this is a sure sign of the work of the *Spirit*, because the trouble occasioned by these sins bears a more immediate relation to the Holiness of God, who only is offended by them, they being such as none else can see or know.

2. *Natural Convictions deal only with a mans Conversation*, not with his state and condition, with sins actual, not original; but *spiritual Convictions* reach to all sins, to sins of Heart, as well as sins of Life; to the sin of our nature, as well as the sins of practice: to the sin that is born in us, as well as the sin that is done by us.

Where the Spirit of the Lord cometh to work effectually in any soul he holdeth the glass

glass of the Law before the sinners eyes, and openeth his eyes to look into the Glass, and to see all that deformity and filthiness that is in his Heart and Nature.

The Apostle *Paul* said *I had not known sin, but by the Law*, Rom. 7 7 How can this be true, that he had not known sin, but by the Law, when as the light of Nature discovers sin? It is said of the *Gentiles, that having not the Law, they were a Law unto themselves.* Rom. 2. 14.

This sin therefore that the Apostle speaks of is not to be understood of sin actual, but of sin original; I had not known the pollution of Nature, that fountain of sin that is within, this I had not known but by the Law; and indeed this is a discovery that natural light cannot make: It is true, the Philosopher could say, πάντων ὡν πρώτα κακῶν ἐπιθυμία ἐστίν, that lust is the first and chief of all sins, but I cannot think he meant it of original sin, but of the *inordinacy of appetite, and desire at most*; for I find that the wisest of the Philosophers understood nothing of Original sin; hear *Seneca*, *Erras si tecum vitia nasci putas, supervenerunt, ingesta sunt*; sin is not born with thee, but brought in since. *Tam sine vitio, quàm sine virtute nascimur.* Timon apud Laertium.

Quintilian saith, It is more marvel that any one man sins, than that all men should live honestly, sin is so against the nature of men; how blind were they in this point! and so was *Paul*, till the Spirit of the Lord discovered it to him by the Word. And indeed this is a discovery proper to the Spirit. It is he that makes the sinner see all the deformity and filthiness that is within; it is he that pulleth off all the Sinners rags, and makes him see his naked and wretched condition; it is he that shews us the *blindness*

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of the Mind, the stubbornness of the Will, the disorderedness of the Affections, the fearedness of the Conscience, the plague of our Hearts, and the sin of our Natures, and therein the desperateness of our state.

3. *Natural Convictions carry the Soul out to look more on the evil that comes by sin, than on the evil that is in sin*; so that the Soul under this Conviction is more troubled at the dread of Hell, and Wrath, and Damnation than at the vileness and hainous nature of sin.

But now *spiritual Convictions* work the Soul into a greater sensibleness of the evil that is in sin, than of the evil that comes by sin; the dishonour done to God by walking contrary to his will, the wounds that are made in the Heart of Christ, the grief that the Holy Spirit of God is put to, this wounds the Soul more than a thousand Hells.

4. *Natural Convictions are not durable, they are quickly worn out*; they are like a slight cut in the skin, that bleeds a little, and is sore for the present, but is healed again, and in a few days not so much as a scar to be seen.

But *spiritual Convictions* are durable, they cannot be worn out, they abide in the Soul till they have reached their end, (which is, the *change* of the *sinner.*)

The *Convictions of the Spirit* are like a deep wound in the flesh, that goes to the bone, and seems to endanger the life of the Patient, and is not healed but with great skill; and when it is healed, leaves a scar behind it, that when the Patient is well, yet he can say, *Here is the mark of my wound, which will never wear out.*

Una eademq; manus vulnus opemq; tulit.

So a Soul that is under *spiritual Conviction*, his wound is deep, and not to be healed, but by

by the great skill of the heavenly Physician; and when it is healed, there are the tokens of it remaining in the Soul, that can never be worn out; so that the Soul may say, *Here are the marks and signs of my Conviction still in my Soul.*

5. *Natural Convictions make the Soul shy of God:* Guilt works fear, and fear causes estrangedness: Thus it was with *Adam*, when he saw his nakedness, he ran away and hid himself from God. Gen. 3. 8.

Now spiritual Convictions drive not the Soul from God, but unto God. *Ephraim's* Conviction was spiritual, and he runs to God, *Turn thou me, and I shall be turned.* So that there is, you see, a great difference between *Conviction* and *Conviction*; between that which is natural, and that which is spiritual, that which is common, and that which is saving. Jer. 31. 3.

Yea such is the difference, that though a man hath never so much of the former, yet if he be without the latter, he is but *almost a Christian*, and therefore we have great reason to enquire more after this *spiritual Conviction.* For,

1. *Spiritual Conviction is an essential part of found Conversion:* Conversion begins here: True *Conversion* begins in *Convictions*, and true *Convictions* end in *Conversion.*

Till the Sinner be convinced of sin, he can never be converted from sin. Christ's coming was as a Saviour to die for sinners; and the Spirit's coming is to convince us as sinners, that we may close with Christ as a Saviour. Till sin be throughly discovered to us, interest in the Blood of Christ cannot rightly be claimed by us; nay, so long as sin is unseen, Christ will be unsought. *They that be whole need not the Physician, but they that are sick.* Mat. 9. 12.

2. *Slight*

2. *Slight and common Convictions,* (when they are but skin deep) *are the cause of much Hypocrisie*; slight Convictions may bring the Soul to clasp about Christ, but not to close with Christ: and this is the guise of an Hypocrite: I know no other rise and spring of Hypocrisie, like this of slight Convictions: This hath filled the Church of Christ with Hypocrites.

Nay it is not only the spring of Hypocrisie, but it is also the spring of *Apostasie*: What was the cause that the *seed was said to wither away?* Matth. 13. 5, 6. It was because *it had no deepnes of Earth.* Where there is through conviction, there is a *depth of Earth* in the heart, and there the *seed of the Word grows*; but where convictions are slight and common, there the seed withers for want of depth; so that you see clearly in this one instance, whence it is that many are but *almost Christians*, when they have gone so far in Religion; *viz.* for want of sound Convictions. Mat 13. 5, 6.

Secondly; And this hath a near relation to the former; *It is for want of a through work of Grace first wrought in the heart*; Where this is not, all a mans following Profession comes to nothing. That Scholar is never like to read well, that will needs be in his *Grammar* before he is out of his *Primer*. Cloth that is not wrought well in the Loom, will never wear well, nor wear long, it will do little service; so that Christian that doth not come well off the Loom, that hath not a through work of Grace in his heart, will never wear well, he will shrink in the wetting, and never do much service for God. It is not the pruning of a bad Tree will make it bring forth good fruit; but Mat. 13. 20, 21.

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the Tree must be made *good*, before the fruit can be good. *Matth.* 12. 33.

He that takes up a Profession of Religion with an unbroken heart, will never serve Christ in that Profession with his whole heart.

If there be not a true change in that mans heart, that yet goes far, and does much in the ways of God, to be sure he will either die an Hypocrite or an Apostate.

Look, as in nature, if a man be not well born, but prove crooked or mishapen in the Birth, why he will be crooked as long as he lives; you may bolster or stuff out his cloaths to conceal it, but the crookedness, the deformity remains still; you may hide it, but you cannot help it; it may be covered, but it cannot be cured.

So it is in this case; if a man come into a Profession of Religion, but be not right born; if he be not *begotten of God*, and *born of the Spirit*; if there be not a through work of Grace in his heart, all his Profession of Religion will never mend him; He may be bolstered out by a life of duties, but he will be but an Hypocrite at last, for want of a through work at first; a form of Godliness may cover his crookedness, but will never cure it. John 3. 5.

A man can never be a true *Christian*, nor accepted of God, though in the highest Profession of Religion, without a work of Grace in the heart. For,

1. *There must be an answerableness in the frame of that mans heart (that would be accepted of God) to the duties done by him*; his spirit and affections within, must carry a proportion to his Profession without. Prayer without faith, obedience to the Law given, without fear and holy reverence of the Law-

Law-giver, God abhors: Acts of *internal* Worship must answer the duties of *external* Worship.

Now where there is no grace wrought in the heart, there can never be any proportion or answerableness in the frame of that mans Heart, to the duties done by him.

2. *Those duties that find acceptance with God, must be done in sincerity.* God doth not take our duties by tale, nor judge of us according to the *frequency of our performances*, but according to the sincerity of our Hearts in the performance. It is this that commends both the doer, and the duty to God; with sincerity, God accepts the least we do, without sincerity God rejects the most we *do*, or *can do*: This is that temper of *spirit* which God highly delights in, *Prov.* 11. 20. *They* 1 Chron. 29. 17. *that are of a froward heart, are an abomination to the Lord, but such as are upright in the way, are his delight.*

The Apostle gives it a great *Epithete*, he calls it in 2 *Cor.* 1. 12. εἰλικρινείᾳ Θεοῦ, the *sincerity of God*, that is, such a *sincerity* as is his *special work upon the Soul*, setting the Heart right and upright before him in all his ways.

This is the *Crown of all our Graces*, and the Commendation of all our *Duties*: Thousands perish and go to Hell in the midst of all their performances and duties, merely for want of a little sincerity of Heart to God.

Now where there is not a *change of state*, a *work of Grace* in the Heart, there can be no *sincerity to God-ward*; for this is not *quid proveniens à naturâ*, it is not an Herb that grows in *Nature's Garden*: The *Heart* Jer. 17. 9. of Man is naturally *deceitful, and desperately*

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ly wicked, more opposite to *sincerity*, than to any thing: As things corrupted carry a greater dissimilitude to what they were, than to any thing else which they never were.

God made man upright; now man voluntarily losing this, is become more dislike to himself than to any thing below himself. He is more like a Lion, a Wolf, a Bear, a Serpent, a Toad, than to a man in Innocency.

So that it is impossible to find *sincerity* in any Soul till there be a Work of Grace wrought there by the Spirit of God; and hence it is that a man is but *almost a Christian* when he hath done all.

The fourth Question.

4. *What is the reason that many go no farther in the profession of Religion, than to be almost Christians?*

1. *It is because they deceive themselves in the truth of their own condition*; They mistake their state, and think it good and safe, when it is bad and dangerous: A man may look upon himself as a member of Christ, and yet God may look upon him as a vessel of wrath; As a Child of God by looking more upon his sins than his graces, more upon his failings than his faith, more upon *indwelling lusts*, than *renewing grace*, may think his case very bad, when yet it is very good: *I am black*, saith the Spouse, *Cant.* 1.5. and yet saith Christ, *O thou fairest among women*, ver. 8. So the sinner by looking more upon his duties than his sins, may think he sees his *name written in the book of life*, and yet be in the account of God a very Reprobate. Reason 1.

There is nothing more common, than for a

a man to *think himself something when he is nothing*, and so he *deceives himself*. Many a man blesses himself in his interest in Christ, when he is indeed a stranger to him; Many a man thinks his sin pardoned, when alas he is still in the *gall of bitterness, and bond of iniquity*. Many a man thinks he hath grace when he hath none: *There is* (saith Solomon) *that makes himself rich, and yet hath nothing*. This was the very temper of *Laodicea*; *Thou sayest I am rich, and encreased with goods, and have need of nothing, and knowest not* (pray mind that) *that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked.*

Gal. 6 3.
Act. 8. 23.
Prov. 13. 7.
Rev. 3. 17.

Thou knowest not;] as bad as she was, she thought her state *good*; As poor as she was in grace, she thought she was rich; *As miserable and naked as she was, yet she thought she had need of nothing.*

Now there are several rises or grounds of this mistake.

I'll name five to you.

First, *The desperate deceitfulness of the heart of every natural man*, Jer. 17. 19. *The heart is deceitful above all things*? The *Hebrew* is עקב הלב מבל; the word (עקב) is the same with *Jacobs* name; Now you know he was a supplanter of his Brother *Esau*; he is rightly called *Jacob* (saith he) *for he hath supplanted me these two times.*

Supplantativum cor pravum.
Gen. 27. 36.

So the Word signifies, to be *fraudulent, subtil, deceitful*, and *supplanting*. Thus is the heart of every natural man, עקב מבל *deceitful above all things.*

Psal. 52. 4. You read of the deceitfulness of the *Tongue.*

Mat. 13. 22. And of the deceitfulness of *Riches.*

Prov. 31. 30. And of the deceitfulness of *Beauty.*

And

And of the deceitfulness of *Friends.* Job 6. 15.

But yet the heart is deceitful above them all; Nay you read of the deceitfulness of Satan, yet truly a mans heart is a greater deceiver than he; For he could never deceive a man, if his own heart did not deceive him. Rev. 20. 3.

Now it is from hence that a man presumes upon the goodness of his case, from the desperate treachery of his own heart.

How common is it for men to boast of the goodness of their hearts? *I thank God, though I do not make such a shew and pretence as some do, yet I have as good a heart as the best.* O do but hear *Solomon* in this case; *he that trusteth in his own heart is a fool.* Will any wise man commit his money to the Cutpurse? Will he trust a cheat? It is a good Rule, μέμνησο ἀπιστεῖν, Remember to distrust; and it was *Austins* Prayer, *Domine libera me à meipso:* That man that trusts to his own heart, shall be sure to find himself deceived at last. Prov. 28. 26.

Secondly, This mistake arises from *the Pride of a Mans Spirit*; There is a proud Heart in every natural man; There was much of this pride in *Adams* sin, and there is much of it in all *Adams* sons; It is a radical sin, and from hence arises this overweening opinion of a mans state and condition; *Solomon* saith, *Be not Righteous overmuch.* *Austin* speaking occasionally of those words, saith, It is not *justitia sapientis*, but *superbia præsumentis*; Not meant of the righteousness of the wise man, but of the *pride* of the presumptuous man. Now in this sense every carnal man is Righteous overmuch, though he hath none of that righteousness which commends him to God, *viz.* Eccles. 7. 16. *Aug. Sent.* 365.

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the Righteousness of Christ, yet he hath too much of that *Righteousness* which commends him to himself, and that is self-righteousness.

A proud man hath an eye to see his *beauty*, but not his *deformity*; his *parts*, but not his *spots*; *his seeming righteousness*, but not his *real wretchedness*.

It must be a work of grace that must shew a man the want of grace. The *haughty* eye looks upwards, but the humble eye looks downward; and therefore this is the Believer's Motto; *The least of Saints, the greatest of Sinners*; but the carnal man's Motto is, *I thank God I am not as other men.*

Eph. 3. 8. 1 Tim. 1. 15. Luk. 18. 11

Thirdly; *Many deceive themselves with common grace instead of saving, through that resemblance that is between them.* As many take counterfeit money for currant Coyn, so do too many take common grace for true, *in similibus facilis est deceptio.* *Saul* took the Devil for *Samuel*, because he appeared in the Mantle of *Samuel*; So many take common grace for saving, because it is like saving grace; A man may be under a supernatural work, and yet fall short of a saving work; The first raiseth nature, the second only reneweth nature; Though every saving work of the Spirit be supernatural, yet every supernatural work of the Spirit is not saving; And hence many deceive their own Souls, by taking a *supernatural work* for a *saving work*.

1 Sam 28.14.

Fourthly, *Many mistake a profession of Religion for a work of conversion, and out-side reformation for a sure sign of inward regeneration.* If the out-side of the cup be washed, then they think all is clean, though it be never so foul within. This is the common *Rock* that so many Souls split upon, to their eternal hazard,

hazard, taking up a form of *godliness, but denying the power thereof.*

Fifthly, *Want of a home application of the Law of God to the Heart and Conscience, to discover to a man the true state and condition he is in.* 2 Tim. 3. 5.

Where this is wanting, a man will sit down short of a true *work of grace*, and will reckon his case *better than it is*. That is a notable passage which the Apostle hints concerning himself; *I was alive without the Law once, but when the Commandment came, sin revived, and I died.* Rom. 7. 9.

Here you have an account of the *different apprehensions Paul* had of his condition *with* and *without the Word.*

1. Here is his apprehension of his condition without the Word, *I was alive* (saith he) *without the Law*; *Paul* had the *Law*, for he was a *Pharisee*, and they had the *form of Knowledge, and of the truth of the Law*; Therefore when he saith, he was *without the Law*, you must not take him literally, but spiritually; he was without the power and efficacy of it upon his Heart and Conscience, convincing and awakening and discovering sin; and so long as this was his case, he doubted not of his state, he was confident of the goodness of his condition; This he hinted when he saith, *I was alive*; but then, Phil. 3. 5, 6. Rom. 2. 20.

2. Here is his apprehension of his condition with the Word, and that is quite contrary to what it was before; *When the Commandment came, (saith he) then sin revived, and I died.*

When the Word of the Lord came with power upon his Soul, when the Spirit of God set it home effectually upon his Conscience,

ence, that is meant by the coming of the *Commandment, then sin revived, and I died*, that is, I saw the desperateness of my case, and the filthiness of all my self-righteousness.

Then my hope ceased and my confidence failed; and as before I thought my self alive, and my sin dead; so when God had awakened Conscience by the Word, then I saw my *sin alive and powerful*, and my *self dead and miserable*.

So that this is the first reason why men go no further in the Profession of Religion, than to be *almost Christians*.

It is because they mistake their state, and think it good when it is not; which mistake is five-fold.

A deceitful Heart.

A proud Spirit.

Taking common Grace for saving.

Outward Reformation, for true Regeneration.

Want of home Application of the Law of God to the heart and Conscience.

Reas. 2. 2. *It is from Satans cunning, who if he cannot keep sinners in their open prophaneness, then he labours to perswade them to take up with a form of Godliness*: If he cannot entice them on in their lusts, with a total neglect of Heaven then he entices them to such a Profession as is sure to fall short of Heaven. He will consent to the leaving some sin, so as we do but keep the rest; and to the doing some duties, so as we neglect the rest: Nay, rather than part with his interest in the Soul, he will yield far to our Profession of Religion, and consent to any thing but our Conversion, and closing with Christ for Salvation: He cares not which way we come to Hell, so as he gets us but thither at last.

3. *It*

3. *It is from worldly and carnal Policy:* This is a great hinderance to many: *Policy* many times enters *Caveats* against *Piety*. *Jehu* will not part with his *Calves*, lest he *hazard his Kingdom.* Reas. 3.

Among many men there would be more Zeal and honesty, were there less design and policy. There is an honest policy that helps Religion, but carnal policy hinders it.

We are commanded *to be wise as Serpents*; Mat. 10.16.
now *the Serpent is the subtilest of creatures*; Gen. 3. 1.
but then we must be *innocent as Doves.* If *Piety* be without *Policy*, it wants *security:* If *Policy* be without *Piety*, it wants *integrity: Piety without policy is too simple to be safe; and policy without Piety is too subtil to be good.*

Let men be as wise, as prudent, as subtil, as watchful as they will, but then let it be in the way of God, let it be joyned with holiness and integrity.

That is a cursed wisdom that forbids a man to lanch any farther out in the depth of Religion, than he can see the Land, lest he be taken in a storm before he can make safe to shoar again.

4. *There is some lust espoused in the heart, that hinders a hearty close with Christ*; though they bid fair, yet they come not to God's terms: The *young man would have eternal Life*, and he bid fair for it, a willing Obedience to every command but one; but only one; and will not God abate him one? Is he so severe? Will he not come down a little in his terms, when man rises so high? Must man yield all? Will God yield nothing? Reas. 4. Mat. 19.20.

No, my Brethren, he that underbids for Heaven, shall as surely lose it, as he that will

give

give nothing for it: He that will not give all
Mat. 13. 45, 46. he hath, *part with all for that Pearl of price,* shall as surely go without it, as he that never once cheapens it.

The not coming up to Gods terms, is the ruine of thousands of souls; nay, it is that upon which all that perish, do perish; A naked sinner, to a naked Christ; a bleeding broken *sinner*, to a bleeding broken *Christ*, these are Gods terms.

Most Professors are like Iron between two equal Loadstones; *God* draws, and they propend towards *God*; and the *World* draws, and they incline to the *World*; they are between both, they would not leave God for the World, if they might not be engaged to leave the World for God.

But if they must part with all, with every lust, every darling, every beloved sin,
2 Tim. 4. 10. why then the spirit of *Demas* possesses them, and God is forsaken by them.

My Brethren, this is the great reason why many that are come to be almost Christians, go no farther, some one beloved lust or other hinders them, and after a long and high Profession parts them and Christ for
Gal. 5. 7. ever; they did *run well*, but here it is that they give out, and after all fall short, and perish to Eternity.

Thus having answered these four questions, *viz.*

1. *How far a man may go in the way to Heaven, and yet be but* almost a Christian.

2. *Whence it is that a man goeth so far as to be* almost a Christian.

3. *Whence it is that a man is but* almost a Christian *when he hath gone thus far.*

4. *What is the reason men go no farther in Religion, than to be* almost Christians?

I pro-

I proceed now to the Application.

1. *That Salvation is not so easie a thing as it is imagined to be*; this is attested by our Lord Christ himself, *Mat.* 7. 14. *Strait is the gate, and narrow is the way that leadeth to life, and few there be that find it.* The *gate of Conversion is a very strait gate*, and yet every man that would be saved eternally must enter in at this *strait gate*, for Salvation is impossible without it. *Except a man be born again*, (ἄνωθεν, born from above) *he cannot see the Kingdom of God.* Infer. 1. John 3. 3.

Not that this Gate is strait simply, and in respect of it self, no, for converting Grace is free; the *gate of mercy stands open all the day long*: In the tenders of Gospel-grace none are excluded, unless they exclude themselves; *Christ* doth not say, *If such and such will come to me, I will not cast them out*; but, *Him that cometh unto me (be he who or what he will, if he hath a heart to close with me) I will in no wise cast him out*: He saith not, *If this or that man will, here is water of life for him*; but, *If any man will, let him take the water of life freely.* Christ grudgeth mercy to none: Though Salvation was dearly purchased for us, yet it is freely *proffered* us. *Mat.* 22. 3, 5. Acts 13. 46. John 6. 37. Rev. 22. 17.

So that the *Gate which leadeth to life*, is not strait on Christ's part, or in respect of its self, but it is strait in *respect* of us, because of our lusts and corruptions, which make the entrance difficult; a Needles Eye is big enough for a *thred* to pass through, but it is a strait passage for a Cable Rope; either the *Needles* Eye must be enlarged, or the Cable Rope must be untwisted, or the entrance is impossible. So it is in this case, the Gate of Conversion is a very strait pas-

sage for a carnal corrupt sinner to go in at; the Soul can never pass through with any one lust beloved and espoused; and therefore the sinner must be untwisted from every lust; he must lay aside the love of every sin, or he can never enter in at this gate, for it is a strait gate. And when he is in at this strait gate he meeteth with a narrow way to walk in; so our Lord Christ saith, *Narrow is the way that leadeth to life*, and what way is this, but the way of Sanctification? *For without holiness no man shall ever see the Lord.*

Heb. 12. 14.

Now this way of Sanctification is a very narrow way, for it lies over the neck of every lust, and in the exercise of every Grace, subduing the one, and improving the other, dying daily, and yet living daily, dying to sin, and living to God; this is the way of Sanctification: and oh how few are there that walk in this way! the broad way hath many Travellers in it, but this narrow way is like the ways of *Canaan*, in the days of *Shamgar*; It is said, Judg. 5. 6. *In the days of* Shamgar *the Son of* Anah, *the high ways were unoccupied, and the Travellers walked through by-ways*; In the *Hebrew* it is אורנת עקל קלות *through crooked ways*; the *way of holiness* is by the most an unoccupied way; so saith the Prophet, *Isa.* 35. 8, 9. *A way shall be there, and it shall be called the way of holiness, the unclean shall not pass over it; no Lion shall be there, nor any ravenous beast shall go up thereon; but the redeemed shall walk there*; the unclean, and the Lion, and the ravenous Beast, they are in the crooked ways, none but the Redeemed of the Lord walk in the way of the Lord.

It is no wonder then, that our Lord Christ saith

saith of life, that *few there be that find it*, whenas the *gate is strait*, and the *way narrow* that leadeth to it: Many pretend to walk in the *narrow way*, but they never entred in at the *strait gate*, and many pretend to have entred in at the *strait gate*, but they walk not in the *narrow way*.

Ad coelestem Regnum vacuo deducuntur.

It is a very common thing for a man to perish upon a mistake of his way, to go on in those paths that take hold of Hell, and yet hope to find Heaven at last: Those twenty paths fore-mentioned run into destruction, and yet many choose them, and walk in them as the way of Salvation. As many profane and open sinners perish by choosing the *way of death*, so many formal professors perish by *mistaking the way of life*; This I gather from that our Lord Christ saith, *Few there be that find it*; which doth clearly imply what in *Luke* 13. 24. he doth plainly express, *viz.* that many seek it; *many seek to enter in, and yet are not able*; many run far, and yet do not so run as to obtain; Many bid fair for the *Pearl of Price*, and yet go without it: Hell is had with ease, but the *Kingdom of Heaven suffers violence*, Mat. 11. 12.

1 Cor. 9. 24. *Patitur descensus Averni; sed revocare gradum, superasque evadere ad auras, Hic labor, hoc opus est.*

2. *If many go thus far in the way to Heaven, and yet miscarry. Oh then what shall be the end of them who fall short of these!* If he shall perish who is *almost a Christian*, what shall he do who is not *at all a Christian*? If he that owneth Christ, and professeth Christ, and leaveth many sins for Christ, may be damned notwithstanding; What then shall his doom be that disowneth Christ, and refuseth to part with one sin, one lust, one Oath for *Christ*, *nay*, that *openly* blasphemeth the precious name of *Christ*! If he

Infer. 2.

he that is *outwardly sanctified*, shall yet be eternally rejected, what will the case be of such as are *openly unsanctified*, that have not only the *plague of an hard heart* within, but also the *plague-sore of a profane life* without? If the *formal Professor* must be shut out, surely then the *filthy Adulterer*, *swinish Drunkard*, *the deep swearer*, *the profane Sabbath breaker*, the *foul-mouth'd Scoffer*, yea and every *carnal Sinner much more*; If there be a *wo to him that falleth short of Heaven*, then how *sad is the wo to him who falls short of them that fall short of Heaven*? Ah that God wou'd make this an awakening word to sinners that are asleep in sin, without the least *fear of Death* or *dread of Damnation*.

Use of Examination.

Are there many in the World that are *almost*, and yet but *almost Christians*? Why *then it is time for us to call our condition into question, and to make a more narrow scrutiny into the truth of our spiritual estate*, what it is, whether it be right or no; whether we are sound and sincere in our profession of Religion, or no. When our Lord Christ told his Disciples, *One of you shall betray me*, every one began presently to reflect upon himself; *Master is it I? Master is it I?* So should we do, when the Lord discovers to us from his word, how many there are under the Profession of Religion, that are but almost Christians, we should straight-way reflect upon our hearts, *Lord is it I?* is my heart unsound? Am I but *almost a Christian*? Am I one of them that shall miscarry at last? Am I an hypocrite under a profession of Religion? Have I a form of godliness without the power.

There are two *questions* of very great importance, which we should every one often put to our selves? *Wh*

What am I?
Where am I?

1. *What am I?* Am I Child of God, or not? Am I sincere in *Religion*, or am I only an hypocrite under a profession?

2. *Where am I?* Am I yet in a natural state, or a state of grace? Am I yet in the old-root, in old *Adam*, or am I in the root Christ Jesus? Am I in the Covenant of Works that ministers only wrath and death? Or am I in the Covenant of Grace, that ministers life and peace.

Indeed this is the first thing a man should look at; There must be a change of state, before there can be a change of heart; We must come under a change of Covenant, before we can be under a change of condition, for the *new Heart*, and the *new Spirit* is promised in the *new Covenant*? There is nothing of that to be heard of in the *old*, now a man must be under the *new Covenant*, before he can receive the blessing promised in the *new Covenant*: He must be in a *new Covenant state*, before he can receive a *new Covenant-heart*; No Mercy, no Pardon, no Change, no Conversion, no Grace dispensed out of Covenant; therefore this should be our great enquiry, for if we know not *where* we are, we cannot know *what* we are; and if we know not what we are, we cannot be what we should be, *viz.* *altogether Christians*. Let me then, I beseech you, press this duty upon you that are *Professors*, try *your own hearts*, *examine your selves whether you are in the Faith*, *prove your own selves*. I urge this upon most cogent arguments. Ezek. 36. 26. 2 Cor. 13. 5.

1. *Because many rest in a notion of godliness, and outward shews of Religion, and yet remain in their natural condition*; Many *are* Jam. 1. 22.

hearers of the Word, but not *doers of it*, and so *deceive their own Souls*: Some neither *hear* nor *do*, these are *prophane sinners*; some both *hear* and *do*, these are *true believers*; some *hear*, but they do not *do*, these are *Hypocritical Professors*.

He that slights the Ordinances, cannot be a true Christian, but yet it is possible a man may own them, and profess them, and yet be no true Christian; who would trust to a profession, that shall see *Judas* a Disciple, an Apostle, a Preacher of the Gospel, one that cast out Devils, to be cast out himself? *He is not a Jew which is one outwardly, neither is that Circumcision which is outward in the flesh; but he is a Jew which is one inwardly, and Circumcision is that of the heart, in the Spirit, and not in the letter, whose praise is not of men, but of God.* Rom. 2. 28.

2. *Because Errors in the first foundation are very dangerous*; If we be not right in the main, in the fundamental work; if the Foundation be not laid in grace in the heart, all our following profession comes to nothing; The *house* is *built* upon a *sandy foundation*, and though it may *stand* for a *while*, yet *when the floods come, and the winds blow and beat upon it, great will be the fall of it.* Mat. 7. 27.

3. *Because many are the deceits that our Souls are liable to in this case*; There are many things like grace, that *are not grace*; now it is the likeness and similitude of things that deceives, and makes one thing to be taken for another. *In similibus facilis est deceptio.*

Many take *gifts* for *grace*, *common knowledge* for *saving knowledge*; when as a man may have great gifts, and yet no grace; great knowledge, and yet not know Jesus Christ.

Some take *common faith* for *saving*; When as

as a man may believe all the truths of the Gospel all the Promises, all the Threatnings, all the Articles of the Creed to be true, and yet perish for want of saving faith.

Some take *morality* and *restraining grace*, for *piety* and *renewing grace*: When as it is common to have sin much restrained, where the heart is not renewed.

Some are deceived with a *half-work*, taking *conviction* for *conversion*, *reformation* for *regeneration*; we have many Mermaid Christians;

Desinit in piscem mulier formosa superne.

Or like Nebuchadnezzar's Image, Head of Gold and Feet of Clay; The Devil cheats most men by a *Synecdoche*, putting a part for the whole; Partial Obedience to some commands, for universal obedience to all. Endless are the delusions that Satan fastens upon Souls, for want of this self-search. It is necessary therefore that we try our state, lest we take the shadow for the substance, and embrace a Cloud instead of *Juno*. Dan. 2.22,23.

4. *Satan will try us at one time or other:* He'll winnow us, and sift us to the bottom; and if we now rest in a groundless confidence, it will then end in a comfortless despair. Luke 22.31.

Nay God himself will search and try us at the day of Judgement especially and who can abide that tryal, that never tries his own heart?

5. *Whatsoever a mans state be, whether he be altogether a Christian or no. whether his Principle be sound or no, yet it is good to examine his own heart*; If he find his heart good, his principles right and sound, this will be matter of rejoycing; If he find his heart rotten, his principles false and unsound, Gal 6.4.

the discovery is in order to a renewing; If a man have a disease upon him, and know it, he may send to the Physician in time, but what a sad vexation will it be, not to see a disease till it be past cure? So for a man to be Graceless, and not see it till it be too late, to think himself a Christian when he is not. and that he is in the right way to Heaven, when he is in the ready way to Hell. and yet not know it till a death bed, or a judgement day confute his confidence; This is the most irrecoverable misery.

These are the grounds upon which I press this duty of examining our state; O that God would help us in the doing this necessary duty!

Quest. You'll say. *But how shall I come to know whether I am almost, or altogether a Christian?* If a man may go *so far*, and yet *miscarry*, How shall I know when my foundation is right, when I am a *Christian indeed.*

Answ. 1. *The altogether Christian closes with, and accepts of Christ upon Gospel Terms.* True *Unism* makes a *true Christian:* Many close with Christ, but it is upon their own terms, they take him, and own him, but not as God offers him. The terms upon which God in the Gospel offers Christ, are, that we shall accept of a broken Christ with a *broken Heart*, and yet a whole Christ with the *whole Heart.*

A broken Christ with a *broken Heart*, as a witness of our *Humility*; a *whole Christ* with a *whole Heart*, as a witness of our *sincerity.* A *broken Christ* respects his *suffering for sin*; a *broken Heart* respects our *sense of sin*; a *whole Christ* includes *all his Offices*; a *whole Heart* includes *all our faculties.* Christ is a *King*, *Priest* and *Prophet*, and all as Mediator;

tor; without any one of *these Offices*, the *work of Salvation* could not have been *compleated:* As a Priest, he *redeems us*; as a Prophet, he *instructs us*; as a King, he *sanctifies* and *saves us:* Therefore the Apostle says, *He is made to us of God, Wisdom, Righteousness, Sanctification and Redemption:* Righteousness and Redemption flow from him as a *Priest*, Wisdom as a *Prophet*, Sanctification as a *King*.

Now many embrace Christ as a *Priest*, but yet they own him not as a *King* and *Prophet*; *they like to share in his Righteousness*, but not to *partake* of his holiness; they would be redeemed by him, but they would not submit to him; they would be saved by his blood, but not submit to his power. Many love the priviledges of the Gospel, but not the duties of the Gospel. Now these are but almost Christians notwithstanding their close with Christ, for it is upon their own terms, but not upon Gods. The Offices of Christ may be distinguished, but they can never be divided. Luk. 19. 27.

But the true Christian owns Christ in all his Offices; He doth not only close with him as *Jesus*, but as *Lord Jesus*; he says with *Thomas, My Lord, and my God.* He doth not only believe in the merit of his death, but also conforms to the manner of his life; as he believes in him so he lives to him; He takes him for his wisdom, as well as for his righteousness, for his sanctification as well as his redemption. Joh. 20. 28.

2. *The altogether Christian hath a through work of grace and sanctification wrought in the heart, as a spring of duties.* Regeneration *is a whole change, all old things are done away, and all things become new:* It is a perfect 2 Cor. 5. 17.

fect work as to parts, though not as to degrees. Carnal men do duties, but they are from an unsanctified heart, and that spoils all. *A new piece of cloth* never doth well *in an old garment*, for the *rent is but made worse*. When a mans heart is throughly renewed by grace, the mind savingly enlightned, the *Conscience* throughly convinced, the will truly humbled and subdued, the affections spiritually raised and sanctified, and when Mind, and Will, and Conscience, and Affections, all joyn issue to help on with the performance of the duties commanded; then is a man *altogether a Christian.*

Mat. 9. 16.

3. *He that is altogether a Christian, looks to the manner, as well as to the matter of his duties*; Not only that they be done, but how they be done. He knows the Christians priviledges lye in *Pronouns*, but his duty in *Adverbs*; it must not be only *bonum, good*, but it must be *bene*, that good must be rightly done.

Here the *almost Christian* fails, he doth the same duties that others do for the matter, but he doth them not in the same manner; While he minds the substance, he regards not the circumstance: If he pray, he regards not *faith* and *fervency*, in Prayer; if he hear, he doth not mind Christs Rule, *Take heed how you hear*: if he obeys, he looks not to the frame of his heart in obeying, and therefore miscarries in all he doth: *bonum oritur ex integra causa, malum ex quolibet defectu*; any of these defects spoil the good of every duty.

Jam. 5 16.
Luk. 8. 18.
Rom. 6. 17.

4. *The altogether Christian is known by his sincerity, in all his performances.* Whatever a man does in the duties of the Gospel, he cannot be a Christian without sincerity. Now the

the *almost Christian* fails in this, for though he doth much, prays much, hears much, obeys much, yet he is an hypocrite under all.

5. *He that is altogether a Christian, hath an answerableness within to the Law without.* There is a *connaturalness* between the *Word of God*, and the *Will of a Christian*; his Heart is (as it were) the *Transcript of the Law*; the same *Holiness* that is *commanded in the Word*, is *implanted in his Heart*, the same Conformity to Christ, that is enjoyned by the *Word of God*, is wrought in the Soul by the *Spirit of God*: The same *Obedience* which the *Word requireth of him*, the Lord enableth him to *perform*, by his *Grace bestowed on him*. This is that which is promised in the *New covenant*: *I will put my Law in their inward parts, and write it in their Hearts*, Jer. 31. 33. Now the writing his Law in us, is nothing else but his working that Grace and Holiness in us which the Law commandeth and requireth of us. Heb. 8. 10. and 10. 16.

In the *Old Covenant Administration*, God wrote *his Laws* only upon *Tables of Stone*, but not upon the Heart; and therefore, though God wrote them, yet they broke them; but in the *New Covenant Administration*, God provides new Tables; *not Tables of Stone, but the Fleshly Tables of the Heart*, and writes his Laws there, that there might be νομος ενδον, a *Law within* answerable to the *Law without*; and this every true Christian hath; so that he may say in his measure as our Lord Christ did: *I delight to do thy Will, O my God, thy Law is within my heart.* Every Believer hath a *light within* him, not guiding him to despise and slight, but to prize and walk by the *light without* him; the *Word* commands. 2 Cor. 3. 3. Psal. 40. 8.

commands him to *walk in the light*, and the *light* directs him to *walking according to the Word.*

Moreover, from this *impression of the Law* upon the Heart *Obedience* and *Conformity* to *God* becomes the *choice* and *delight* of the Soul; for Holiness is the very *nature* of the *new Creature*; so that if there were *no Scripture, no Bible* to guide him, yet he would be *holy*, for he hath received *grace for grace*; there is a *grace* within to answer to the *word of Grace* without.

Joh. 1. 16.

Now the *almost Christian* is a stranger to this *Law of God* within, he may have some conformity to the Word in *outward Conversation*, but he cannot have this answerableness to the Word in *inward Constitution*

6. *The altogether Christian is much in Duty, and yet much above Duty: much in duty*, in regard of *Performances*; *much above duty*, in regard of *dependance*; *much in duty* by obeying, but *much above duty* by believing: He lives in his Obedience, but he doth not live upon his Obedience, but upon *Christ*, and his *Righteousness*.

The *Almost Christian fails in this*: He is much *in duty*, but not *above it*, but rests *in it*; he works for *rest*, and he rests in his *works*; he cannot come to believe and obey too, if he believes, then he thinks there is no need of Obedience and so casts off that, if he be much in Obedience, then he casts off Believing, and thinks there is no need of that: He cannot say with *David*, *I have hoped for thy Salvation, and done thy Commandments.*

Psal. 119. 166.

The more a man is *in duty*, and the more *above it*; the more in *doing*, and more in *believing*; the *more a Christian.*

7. *He*

7. *He that is altogether a Christian is universal in his Obedience*; he doth not obey one command, and neglect another, do one duty, and cast off another; but he hath respect to all the commands, he endeavours to leave every sin, and love every duty. Psal. 119. 6.

The *almost Christian* fails in this, his obedience is partial and piece meal; if he obeys one command he breaks another; the duties that least cross his lust, he is much in; but those that do he lays aside.

The *Pharisees fasted, prayed, paid Tithes*, &c but they did not lay aside their *covetousness*, their *oppression*, they *devoured Widows Houses*, they were *unnatural to Parents*. Mat. 23. 23. Mat. 23. 14.

8. The *Altogether Christian makes Gods glory the chief end of all his performances*; If he prays, or hears, or gives, or fasts, or repents, or obeys, &c. Gods glory is the main end of all: it is true, he may have somewhat else at the hither end of this work, but God is at the further end; as *Moses's Rod* swallowed up the *Magicians Rods*, so Gods glory is the ultimate end that swallows up all his other ends. Now the *almost Christian* fails in this, his ends are corrupt and selfish: *God* may possibly be at the hither end of his work, but self is at the further end, for he that was never truly cast out of himself, can have no higher end than himself.

Now then examine thy self by these characters, put the *question* to thy own Soul, dost thou close with *Christ* upon Gospel terms? is *grace* in the *heart* the principle of thy performances? dost thou look to the manner, as well as the matter of thy duties? dost thou do all in sincerity? is there an answerableness within, to the law without? art thou much above duty, when much in duty?

duty? Is thy obedience universal? Lastly, is Gods glory the end of all? If so, then art thou not only almost, but altogether a Chrian.

2 Use of Caution.

Oh take heed of being almost, and yet but almost a Christian; it is a great complaint of God *against* Ephraim, *that he is a cake not turned*; that is, *half baked*, neither *raw* nor *roasted*, οὔτε ψυχρὸς οὔτε ζεστὸς, neither cold nor hot, as *Laodicea*, Rev 3. 17. *Because thou art neither hot nor cold, therefore I will spue thee out of my mouth.*

Hos 7. 8. *Neque crudus, neque coctus.*

This is a condition that of all others is { *Greatly unprofitable.* *Exceedingly uncomfortable.* *Desperately dangerous.*

First, *It is greatly unprofitable to be but almost a Christian*, for failing in any one point, will ruine us as surely as if we had never made any attempts for Heaven. It is no advantage to the soul to be almost converted; For the little that we want, spoils the good of all our attainments: we say, as good never a whit as never the nearer; *Ad nihilum valet quod non valet ad finem suum*; there is no profit in leaving this or that sin, unless we leave all sin; *Herod* heard *John* gladly, and did many things, but he kept his *Herodias*, and that ruined him. *Judas* did many things, *prayed* much, preached much, professed much, but yet his *covetousness* spoiled all; one sin ruined the young man that had kept all the commands but one. Thus he *that offends in one point, is guilty of all.* That is, that lives willingly and allowedly in any one sin, he brings the guilt of the violation of the whole Law of God upon his Soul, and that upon a twofold account.

Deus non vult cum exceptione celi.

Jam. 2. 10.

1. Because he manifests the same contempt of the authority of God, in the wilful breach of one, as of all.

2. By

2. By allowing himself in the breach of any one command, he shews he kept none in Obedience and Conscience to God, for he that hates sin as sin, hates all sin, and he that obeys the command as the express Will of God, obeys every Command. And for this cause, the least sin willingly, and with allowance lived in, spoils the good of all our obedience, and lays the soul under the whole wrath of God. One leak in a Ship may sink her, though she be tight every where else; *Gideon had severty Sons, and but one Bastard*, and yet that one *Bastard destroyed all his Sons*; so may one sin spoil all our services, one lust beloved may spoil all our profession, as that one Bastard slew all the Sons of *Gideon*.

Jud. 8. 33, 35. *comp. with* c. 9. v. 5.

Secondly, *It is exceedingly uncomfortable*, as appears three ways.

1. *In that such a one is hated of God and Men*, the World hates him, because *of his profession*, and God abhors him, because of his *dissimulation*; the *World* hates him, because he *seems good*, and God hates him, because *he doth but seem so*. No person that God hates more than the *almost Christian*; *I would thou wert either cold or hot, either all a Christian*, or not *at all a Christian*.

Rev. 3. 15, 16.

Tepida evomere consuevimus, unde ad vomitum ciendum quidam nova tepida utuntur. Drus.

Because thou art neither cold nor hot therefore I will spew thee out of my mouth. What a loathsome expression doth God here use, to shew what an utter abhorrency there is in him against lukewarm Christians?

How uncomfortable then must that condition needs be, wherein a man is abhorred both of God and Man?

2. *It is uncomfortable in regard of sufferings; for being almost a Christian*, will bring us into suffering, but being but *almost a Christian*,

stian will never carry us through suffering. In *Mat.* 13. 20, 21. It is said *He that receiveth the seed into stony ground, the same is he that hears the word, and with joy receives it; yet hath he not root in himself, but dureth for a while; for when Tribulation or Persecution ariseth because of the word, by and by he is offended.*

There are four things observable in the words.

1. That the stony ground may receive the word with joy.

2. That it may for some time abide in a Profession of it; *he dureth for a while.*

3. That this Profession will expose to suffering; for mark, *Persecution* is said to *arise because of the word.*

4. This suffering will cause an apostatizing from Profession, for that which is here called *offence*, is in *Luke* 8. 13. called *falling away which for a while believe, and in time of temptation fall away.*

I gather hence, a Profession may expose a man as much to suffering, as the Power of Godliness, but without the Power of Godliness there is no holding out in a Profession under suffering. The World hates the shew of Godliness, and therefore Persecutes it; *The almost Christian wants the substance, and therefore cannot hold out in it.*

Now this must needs be very uncomfortable; If I profess Religion, I am like to suffer; If I do but profess it, I am never like to endure.

3. *It is uncomfortable in regard of that deceit it lays our hopes under*; to be deceived of our hopes causeth sorrow as well as shame: He that is but *almost a Christian* hopes for Heaven, but unless he be *altogether a Christian*, he shall never come there. Now

Now to periſh with hopes of Heaven, to go to Hell by the Gates of Glory, to come to the very door, and then be ſhut out, as the five Virgins were, to die in the Wilderneſs, within the ſight of the promiſed Land, at the very brinks of *Jordan*, this muſt needs be ſad; to come within a ſtride of the Gole, and yet miſs it, to ſink within ſight of Harbour, oh how uncomfortable is this! Mat. 25. 10.

4. *As it is greatly unprofitable, and exceedingly uncomfortable to be but almoſt a Chriſtian, ſo it is deſperately dangerous:* For,

1. *This doth* obicem ponere, *it hinders the true work*: A man lies in a fairer capacity for Converſion that lies in open enmity and Rebellion, than he that ſooths up himſelf in the formalities of Religion. This I gather from that Parable of the two Sons which our Lord Chriſt urged to the profeſſing *Scribes* and *Phariſees*, Mat. 21. 28.

There was a man had two Sons and he came to one, and ſaid, Go work to day in my Vineyard, he ſaid, I will not; but afterwards repented and went. Mat. 21. 28. to 32.

And he came to the ſecond, and ſaid likewiſe, and he ſaid, *I go Sir, but went not.*

The firſt repreſents the carnal open ſinner, that is called by the Word, but refuſes, yet afterwards repents, and believes. The ſecond repreſents the hypocritical Profeſſor, that pretends much, but performs little; Now mark how Chriſt applies this Parable, *ver.* 31. *Verily I ſay unto you, that the* Publicans *and the* Harlots *go into the Kingdom of God before you.*

And upon this account it is better not to be at all, than to be almoſt a Chriſtian, for the almoſt hinders the altogether. It is better (in this regard) to be a ſinner without a Profeſſion,

Profession than to be a Professor without Conversion; for the one lies fairer for an inward change, when the other rests in an outward. Our Lord Christ tells the *Scribe*, Mark 12. 34. *Thou art not far from the Kingdom of God*, yet never like to come there. None farther from the Kingdom of God, than such as are not far from the Kingdom of God. As for instance, when there lies but one lust, one sin between a Soul and Christ, that Soul is not far from Christ; but now when the Soul rests in this nearness to Christ, and yet will not part with that one Lust for Christ, but thinks his condition secured though that lust be not subdued; who is farther from the Kingdom of God than he?

So our Lord Christ tells the young man, *Mark* 10. 21. *One thing thou lackest*; why he was very near Heaven, near being a Christian altogether, he was almost saved; he tells Christ he had kept all the Commands, *ver.* 20. He lacked but *one thing*, I say, but one thing; but it was a great thing; that one thing he lacked was more than all things
Luke 10. 42. he had: for it was the *one thing necessary*, it was a new heart; a work of Grace in his Soul, a change of state, a Heart weaned from the World; I, this was the one thing, and he that lacks this one thing, perishes with his all things else.

2. *This condition is so like a state of Grace, that the mistake of it for Grace, is easie and common*; and it is very dangerous to mistake any thing for Grace that is not Grace; for in that a man contents himself, as if it were Grace. Formality doth often dwell next door to Sincerity, and one Sign serves both, and so the House may be easily mistaken,

and

and by that means a man may take up his lodging there, and never find the way out again.

What one saith of Wisdom, (*Multi ad sapientiam pervenissent, nisi se jam pervenisse putassent*; Many might have been wise had they not thought themselves so, when they were otherwise) the same I may say of Grace; many a formal Professor might have been a sincere Believer, had he not mistook his Profession for Conversion, his Duties for Grace, and so rested in that for sincerity, that is but Hypocrisie.

3. *It is a degree of Blasphemy to pretend to grace, and yet have no grace.* I gather this from that, *Rev.* 2. 9. *I know the Blasphemy of them which say they are Jews, and are not.* This place undergoes varieties of Constructions; *Grotius* and *Paræus* do not make their Blasphemy to lye in their saying, *they are Jews, and are not* but to lye in the reproaches that these *Jews* fastned upon Christ, calling him *Impostor, Deceiver, one that hath a Devil*, &c.

Brightman goes another way, and saith, this was the Blasphemy of these *Jews*, they retained that way of Worship that was abrogated; and thrust upon God those old *Rites* and *Ceremonies* which Jesus Christ had abolished, *and nailed to his Cross*, by which they overthrew the glory of Christ, and denied his coming. Col. 2. 14.

But I conceive the Blasphemy of these *Jews* to lye in this, that *they said they were Jews, and were not.* A *Jew* here is not to be taken literally and strictly only, for one of the lineage of *Abraham*, but it is to be taken *Metonymically*, for a true Believer, one of the Spiritual Seed of *Abraham*; *He is a Jew which is one inwardly*, so that for a man

man to say he is a *Jew* when he is not, to profess an interest in Christ when he hath none, to say he hath Grace when he hath none, this Christ calls Blasphemy.

But why should Christ call this Blasphemy? This is hypocrisie, but how may it be said to be Blasphemy? Why, he Blasphemes the great attribute of Gods omniscience, he doth implicitly deny that God sees and knows our hearts and thoughts; For if a Man did believe the omniscience of God, that he searches the heart, and sees, and knows all within, he would not dare to rest in a graceless profession of godliness; This therefore is Blasphemy in the account of Christ.

Bello pax ea deterior.

4. *It is dangerous to be almost a Christian, in that this stills and serves to quiet Conscience.* Now it is very dangerous to quiet Conscience with any thing but the Blood of Christ; it is bad being at peace, till Christ speaks peace: Nothing can truely pacifie Conscience, less than that which pacifies God, and that is the blood of the Lord Christ. Now the almost Christian quiets Conscience, but not with the Blood of Christ; It is not a peace flowing from Christs propitiation, but a peace rising from a formal Profession; not a peace of Christs giving, but a peace of his own making; He silences and bridles Conscience with a form of Godliness, and so makes it give way to an undoing, Soul-destroying peace; He rocks it asleep in the Cradle of duties, and then it is a thousand to one it never awaketh more till death or judgment.

Ah my Brethren, it is better to have Conscience never quiet, than quieted any way but by *the Blood of sprinkling*: A good Conscience unquiet, is the greatest affliction to Saints, and an evil Conscience quiet, is the greatest judgment to sinners.

5. *It*

5. *It is dangerous to be almost a Christian, in respect of the unpardonable sin:* The sin that the Scripture saith, *can never be forgiven, neither in this world nor in the world to come;* I mean, *the sin against the Holy Ghost:* Now such are only capable of sinning that sin, as are but almost Christians. Mat. 12. 32.

A true believer cannot; the work of grace in his heart, *that seed of God abiding in him,* secures him against it, 1 *Joh.* 3. 9. compared with *Chap.* 5. 16, 17, 18.

The prophane, ignorant, open sinner cannot; though he lives daily and hourly in sin, yet he cannot commit this sin, for it must be from an enlightned mind; Every sinner, under the *Gospel* especially, sins sadly against the Holy Ghost, against the strivings and motions of the Spirit; He *resists the Holy Ghost, but yet this is* not the sin *against the Holy Ghost.* Acts 7. 51.

There must be three ingredients to make up that sin.

1. It must be wilful, *Heb.* 10. 26. *If we sin wilfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remains no more sacrifice for sin:*

2. It must be against light and convictions, *after we have received the knowledge of the truth.*

3. It must be *destinata malitia,* in *resolv'd malice:* Now you shall find all these ingredients in the sin of the *Pharisees, Mat.* 12. 22. Christ *heals* one that was *possessed with a Devil,* a great work which all the people wondred at, *ver.* 23. But what say the *Pharisees?* see *ver.* 24. *This fellow casteth out Devils by the Prince of Devils;* Now that this was *the sin against the Holy Ghost,* is clear, for it was both wilfull and malicious, and against

Blasphemia in Spiritum Sanctum ea est quæ quæ destinata malitia contra proprium animi sui sensum Spiritus Sancti gratiam & virtutem, Deique gloriam oppugnat. Luc. Brug. in Mat. 12.

against clear convictions; They could not but see that he was the Son of God, and that this work was a peculiar work of the Spirit of God in him, and yet they say he wrought by the Devil; whereupon Christ charges them with this sin *against the Holy Ghost*, ver. 31, 32, 33. Now the *Pharisees* were a sort of great Professors: whence I gather this conclusion, that it is the *Professor* of Religion that is the subject of this sin; not the open carnal sinner, not the true believer, but the *formal Professor.*

Compare this with Mar. 3. 28, 29, 30.

Not the sinner, for he hath neither *light* nor *grace*; Not the Believer, for he hath both *light* and *grace*; therefore the formal professor, for he hath *light*, but no *grace.* Here then is the great danger of being *almost a Christian*, he is liable to this dreadful unpardonable sin.

6. *This being but almost a Christian, subjects us to Apostasie*; He that gets no good by walking in the ways of God, will quickly leave them, and walk no more in them; this I gather from, *Hos.* 14. 9. *Who is wise, and he shall understand these things? prudent, and he shall know them? for the ways of the Lord are right, and the just shall walk in them, but the transgressors shall fall therein.*

The just shall walk in them;] he whose heart is renewed and made right with God, he shall keep close to God in his ways.

But the transgressor shall fall therein;] the word in the *Hebrew* is *peshangim*, from a word that signifies to *prevaricate*: So that we may read the words thus. *The ways of the Lord are right, and the just shall walk in them, but he that prevaricates*, that is an Hypocrite in the *ways of God, he shall fall therein.*

פשעים

An unsound heart will never hold out long

long in the ways of God, *Joh.* 5. 25. *He was a burning and a shining light, and ye were willing for a season to rejoice in that light.*

For a season,] πρὸς ὥρεν for *an hour*, a short space, and then they left him: It is a notable question *Job* puts concerning the Hypocrite, *Will he delight himself in the Almighty? Will he always call upon God?* Job. 27 10.

He may do much, but these two things he cannot do.

He cannot make God his delight.

He cannot persevere in duties at all times and in all conditions.

He will be an Apostate at last: The *scab of Hypocrisie* usually breaks out in the *plague-sore of Apostacy*: Conversion-ground is standing-ground, it is *terra firma*, but a graceless *profession* of Religion is a slippery ground, and falling ground. *Julian* the Apostate, was first *Julian* the Professor. I know it is possible a Believer may fall, but yet *he rises again, the Everlasting arms are underneath*; but when the Hypocrite falls, who shall help him up? Prov. 24. 16. Deut. 33. 27.

Solomon saith, *Wo to him that is alone when he falls*, that is, without *interest* in Christ; Why wo to him? *For he hath none to help him up.* If Jesus Christ do not recover him, who can? *David* fell and was restored, for he had one to help him up; but *Judas* fell and perished, for he was alone. Eccles. 4. 10.

7. *This being but almost a Christian, provokes God to bring dreadful spiritual judgments upon a man.*

Barrenness is a spiritual judgment: Now this provokes God to give us up to barrenness: When Christ found the Fig-tree that had leaves, but no fruit, he pronounces the curse of *barrenness* upon it: *Never fruit grow* Mat. 21. 19.

on

on thee more: And so *Ezek.* 47. 11. *The miry places thereof and the marish places thereof shall not be healed, they shall be given to salt.*

A spirit of delusion is a sad judgment; why this is the *almost Christians* judgment, that receives the truth, but not in the love of it;

2 Thes. 2. 10, 11, 12. *Because they received not the love of the truth that they might be saved; for this cause God shall send them strong delusions.*

To lose either light, or sight, either Ordinances, or Eyes, is a great spiritual judgment: why, this is the *almost Christians* judgment he that profits not under the means, provokes God to take away either light or sight; either the Ordinances from before his Eyes, or else to blind his Eyes under the Ordinances.

Luk. 19. 42.

To have a hard heart is a dreadful judgment, and there is no hypocrite but he hath a hard heart.

My Brethren, it is a dreadful thing for God to give a man up to spiritual Judgments.

Now this being almost a Christian provokes God to give a man up to spiritual judgments; surely therefore it is a very dangerous thing to be *almost a Christian.*

8. *Being almost and but almost Christians, will exceedingly aggravate our Damnation;* The higher a man rises under the means, the lower he falls if he miscarries; He that falls but a little short of Heaven, will fall deepest into Hell; He that hath been nearest to Conversion, being not Converted, shall have the deepest Damnation when he is Judged. *Capernaums* sentence shall exceed *Sodoms* for severity, because she exceeded *Sodom* in the enjoyment of mercy; She received more from God, She knew more

Mat. 11. 23, 24.

more of God, She professed more for God, and yet was not right with God, therefore she shall be punished more by God. The higher the rise, the greater the fall; The higher the profession, the lower the damnation; he miscarrieth with a light in his hand, he perisheth under many convictions, and convictions never end but in a sound conversion, as in all Saints; or in a sad damnation, as in all Hypocrites: praying ground, hearing ground, professing ground, and conviction ground, is, of all, the worst ground to perish upon.

Now then to summ up all under this Head. *If to be almost a Christian hinders the true work of Conversion: If it be easily mistaken for Conversion: If it be a degree of blasphemy: If this be that which quiets Conscience: If this subjects a man to commit the unpardonable sin: If it lays us liable to Apostacy: If it provokes God to give us up to spiritual Judgments: And if it be that which exceedingly aggravates our damnation:* Sure then it is a very dangerous thing to be almost, and but almost a Christian.

O labour to be altogether Christians, to go farther than they who have gone fartheſt, and yet fall short; This is the great counsel of the Holy Ghost, *So run that ye may obtain*, 1 Cor. 9. 24. *Give diligence to make your Calling and Election sure*, 2 Pet. 1. 10.

Need you any motives to quicken you up to this important duty?

1. *This is that which is not only commanded by God, but that whereunto all the commands of God tend:* A perfect conformity of heart and life to God, is the sum and substance of all the commands both of the Old and New Testament. As the Harlot was for the Consid. 1. 1 Kin. 3. 16, 26.

dividing of the Child, so Satan is for dividing the heart, he would have our love and affections shared between Christ and our Lusts, for he knows that Christ reckons we love him not at all, unless we love him above all. But God will have all or none, *My Son, give me thy heart*, Prov. 23. 26. *Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, with all thy Soul,* Luk. 10. 27. *with all thy might*, Deut. 6. 5.

Look into the Scripture, and see what that is upon which your *only* stands, and you shall find that God hath fixed it upon those great duties which alone tend to the perfection of your state as Christians. God hath fixed your only upon Believing, *Mar.* 5. 36. *Only believe.* God hath fixed your *only* upon obedience, *Mat.* 4. 10. *Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve.* Phil. 1. 27. *Only let your conversation be as becometh the Gospel of Christ*: So that your *only* is fixed by God upon those two great duties of *believing* and *obeying*, both which tend to the perfection of your state as Christians.

Now shall God command, and shall not we obey? Can there be a higher motive to duty, than the Authority of the great God, whose will is the Eternal Rule of Righteousness? O let us fear *God, and keep his Commandments*, for this is כל האדם the *totum hominis*, *the whole duty of man*; So we read it.

Confid. 2. 2. *The Lord Christ is a Saviour throughly, a perfect and compleat Mediator*; He hath not shed his blood by halves, nor satisfied the Justice of God, and redeemed sinners by halves; No, but he went through with his undertakings, he bore all our sins, and shed all his blood, he died to the utmost, satisfied

fied the Justice of God to the utmost, Redeemed sinners to the utmost, and now that he is in Heaven, he interceedeth to the utmost, and is able to save to the utmost. Heb. 7. 25.

It is observed, that our Lord Christ when he was upon the Earth, in the days of his Flesh, he wrought no *Semi-plenam curationem*, no half-cures, but whomsoever they brought to him for healing, he healed them throughout, *Mat.* 14. 35, 36. *They brought unto him all that were diseased, and besought him that they might only touch the hem of his Garment, and as many as touched, were made perfectly whole.*

Oh what an excellent Physician is here! none like him; he cureth, { *Infallibly.* *Suddenly.* *Perfectly.*

He cureth *Infallibly*; none ever came to him for healing, that went without it; He never practised upon any that miscarried under his hand.

He cureth *Suddenly*,; no sooner is his Garment touched, but his Patient is healed. *The Leper*, Mat. 8. 3. is no sooner touched, but immediately cured; the two blind men, *Mat.* 20. are no sooner touched, but their eyes are immediately opened, *ver.* 34. *Mar.* 1. 31. and 2. 12. Luk. 8. 41.

He cureth *perfectly*; *As many as were touched, were made perfectly whole.* Mat. 14. 36.

Now all this was to shew what a perfect and compleat Saviour Jesus Christ would be to all sinners that would but come to him. They should find healing in his blood, vertue in his righteousness, and pardon for all their Sins, whatever they were; Look as Christ healed all the diseases of all that came to him when he was *on earth*, so he pardons all the sins, and healeth all the wounds of all those Souls that come to him now he is in Heaven.

He is a Saviour throughout, and shall not we be Saints throughout? shall he be altogether a Redeemer, and shall not we be altogether Believers? Oh what a shame is this!

Consider. 3. 3. *There is enough in Religion to engage us to be altogether Christians*, and that whether we respect profit or comfort, for Grace brings both.

First, *Religion is a gainful thing*; and this is *argumentum cogens*, a compelling Motive, that becomes effectual upon all. Gain is the *God* whom the World worships; what will not men do, what will they not suffer for gain? What Journeys do men take by Land, what Voyages by Sea, through hot and cold, through fair and foul, through storm and shine, through day and night, and all for gain.

Now there is no Calling so gainful as this of Religion; It is the most profitable employment we can take up. *Godliness is profitable unto all things*, 1 Tim. 4. 1. It is μεγας πορισμὸς, a great Revenue; If it be closely followed, it brings in the greatest income; indeed some men are religious for the World's sake, such shall be sure not to gain; but they who are religious for Religion's sake, shall be sure not to lose, if Heaven and Earth can recompense them; for *Godliness hath the promise both of the life that now is, and of that which is to come.*

Ah who would not be a Christian, when the gain of Godliness is so great! Many gain much in their worldly Calling, but the profit which the true Believer hath from one hours Communion with God in Christ, weigheth down all the gain of the World: Curled be that man who counts all the gain of the world worth one hours Communion with Jesus

sus Christ, said that noble Marquess *Galeacius Caracciola.* It is no where said in Scripture, Happy is the man that findeth Silver, and the man that getteth fine Gold: These are of no weight in the Balance of the Sanctuary; but it is said, *Happy is the man that findeth wisdom, and the man that getteth understanding; for the Merchandize of it is better than the Merchandize of Silver, and the gain thereof than fine Gold.* Prov. 3. 13, 14.

By *Wisdom* and *Understanding* here, we are to understand the *Grace of Christ*, and so the Spirit of God interpreteth it, *Job* 28. 28. *Behold the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom, and to depart from evil is understanding.*

Now of all Merchants, he that Trades in this *Wisdom* and *Understanding*, will prove the richest man; one *grain of godliness* outweigheth all the *gold of Ophir*: There is no Riches like being *rich in grace*; For,

1. This is the *most necessary Riches*, other things are not so, *silver and gold are not so*; we may be, and be happy without them: There is but one thing necessary, and that is, *The grace of Jesus Christ* in the Heart; have this, and have all, want this, and want all.

2. *It is the most substantial gain*; the things of this World are more *shadow* than *substance*; Pleasure, Honour, and Profit, comprehend all things in this World, and therefore are the carnal mans Trinity. Luke 16. 11.

Ambitiosus honos, & opes, & fœda voluptas,
Hæc tria pro trino Numine mundus habet.

The Apostle *John* calls them, *the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life*; *this* (saith he) *is all that is in the World*; and truly if this be all, all is nothing, for what is pleasure but a dream and conceit? 1 John 2. 19.

what is honour, but fancy and opinion? and what is profit, but a thing of nought? *Why wilt thou set thine eyes upon that which is not?* Prov. 23. 5. The things of the World have in them no solid subsistence, though foolish carnal men call them substance.

אינכי *Et non existunt.*

But now grace is a substantial good; so our Lord Christ calls it, *Prov. 9. 21. That I may cause those that love me to inherit substance,* להנחיל יש *to inherit that which is.* Grace is a reality, other things are but shew and fancy.

3. *Godliness is the safest gain.* The Gain of Worldly things is always with difficulty, but seldom with safety: The Soul is often hazarded in the over-eager pursuit of Worldly things; nay thousands do pawn and lose, and damn their precious Souls eternally for a little Silver and Gold, which are but the Guts and Garbage of the Earth; *And what is a man profited to gain the whole World, if he lose his own Soul?* Mar. 8. 36.

But the gain of Godliness is ever with safety to the Soul, nay the Soul is lost and undone without it, and not saved but by the attainment of it; a Soul without Grace is in a lost and perishing condition; the hazard of Eternity is never over with us, untill the Grace of Christ Jesus be sought by us, and wrought in us. 1 Tim. 6. 17.

4. *Godliness is the surest profit;* As it is safe so it is sure; Men make great ventures for the World, but all runs upon uncertainties; many venture much, and wait long, and yet find no return but disappointment; they sow much, and yet reap nothing.

But the *gain of godliness* is sure, *Prov. 11. 18. To him that soweth righteousness shall be a sure reward.*

And

And as the things of this world are uncertain in the getting, so they are uncertain in the keeping.

Non minor est virtus quàm quærere parta tueri.

If Men do not undo us, Moths may; if Robbery doth not, Rust may; If Rust doth not, Fire may; to which all earthly treasures are incident, as our Lord Christ teacheth us, *Mat. 6. 19.* *Solomon* limneth the World with Wings, *Prov. 23. 5.* *Riches make themselves Wings, and fly as an Eagle towards Heaven.* A man may be rich as *Dives* to day, and yet poor as *Lazarus* to morrow: Oh how uncertain are all worldly things! *Habent res alas possessas sed aquilinas.*

But now the true treasure of Grace in the heart, that can never be lost; It is out of the reach both of Rust and Robber: *He that gets the World, gets a good he can never keep, but he that gets Grace, gets a good he shall never lose.*

5. *The profit of Godliness lyeth not only in this World, but in the World to come:* All other profit lyeth in this World only, Riches and Honours, *&c.* are called this Worlds goods, but the Riches of Godliness is chiefly in the other Worlds goods, in the enjoyment of God and Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit, among Saints and Angels in Glory: Lo, this is the *gain of Godliness*; *such honour have all his Saints.* 1 Tim 4. 8. 1 Joh. 2. 17. Psal. 149. 9.

6. *The gain of Godliness is a durable and eternal gain:* All this Worlds goods are perishing; perishing *pleasures*, perishing *honours*, perishing *profits*, perishing *comforts*; *Riches are not for ever*, saith *Job*, *Hast thou entred into the treasures of the Snow?* *Gregory* upon these words observes, that earthly treasures are treasures of Snow: What pains do Chil- Job 38. 22.

dren take to scrape and roul the *Snow* together to make a *Snow-ball*, which is no sooner done, but the heat of the Sun dissolves it, and it comes to nothing? Why, the treasures of worldly men are but *treasures of Snow*: When Death and Judgment come, they melt away, and come to nothing. *Riches profit not in the day of wrath, but righteousness delivers from death*, Prov. 11. 4.

You see here the great advantage of Godliness: So that if we look at profit, we shall find enough in *Religion* to engage us to be *altogether Christians*. Or,

2. *If we look at comfort*, Religion is the most comfortable *Profession*; there are no comforts to be compared to the comforts of *Grace* and *Godliness*.

1. *Worldly comfort is only outward*, it is but skin-deep; *In the midst of laughter the heart is sorrowful*, Prov. 14. 13. But now the *comfort* that flows from Godliness is an inward comfort, a spiritual joy; therefore it is called *gladness of heart*, Psal. 4. 7. *Thou hast put gladness into my heart*: other *joy smooths the brow*: but this fills the breast.

2. *Worldly comfort hath a nether spring*; The spring of worldly comfort is in the creature, in some earthly enjoyment, and therefore the comfort of worldly men must needs be mixed and muddy; *An unclean fountain cannot send forth pure water.* But spiritual comfort *hath an upper Spring*; the comfort that accompanies Godliness, flows from the manifestations of the love of God in Christ, from the workings of the blessed Spirit in the heart, which is first a *Counsellor*, and then a *Comforter*. And therefore the comforts of the Saints must needs be pure and unmix-

Jam. 3. 11.

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ed comforts, for they flow from a pure Spring.

3. *Worldly comfort is very fading and transitory*; *The triumphing of the wicked is but short, and the joy of the hypocrite is but for a moment*: *Solomon* compares it to the crackling of Thorns under a Pot, *Eccles.* 7. 6. which is but a blaze, and soon out; so is the comfort of Carnal hearts: but now the comfort of Godliness is a durable and abiding comfort, *your heart shall rejoyce, and your joy no man shall take from you.* Job. 20. 5. Joh. 16. 22.

The comfort of Godliness is lasting and everlasting; it abides by us, { *In Life.* / *In Death.* / *After Death.*

First, *It abides by us in Life*; *grace and peace* go together; Godliness brings forth *comfort* and *peace naturally*; *The effect of Righteousness shall be peace*; It is said of the primitive Christians, *They walked in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost*, Act. 9. 31. Every duty done in uprightness and sincerity, reflects some comfort upon the Soul; *In keeping the commands there is great reward*, not only *for keeping* of them, but *in keeping* of them; as every *flower*, so every *duty* carries *sweetness* and *refreshing* with it. Phil. 1. 2. Col. 1. 2. Isa. 32. 17. Psal. 19. 11.

But who more dejected and disconsolate than Saints and Believers, whose lives are more uncomfortable? whose mouths are more filled with complaints than theirs? If a condition of Godliness and Christianity, be a condition of so much comfort, then why are they thus? Object.

That the people of God are often times without comfort, that I grant; *They may walk in the dark, and have no light*: But this is none of the product of Godliness; Grace brings forth no such fruit as this; there is a threefold rise and spring of it. Sol. Isa. 50. 10.

Sin within.
Desertion } without.
Temptation }

1. *Sin* within; The Saints of God are not all Spirit, and no Flesh; all Grace, and no Sin; they are made up of contrary Principles; there is light and darkness in the same mind, sin and grace in the same will, carnal and spiritual in the same affections; there is *the flesh lusting against the spirit* in all these, and too oft, the Lord knows, is the Believer led away captive by these warring lusts; so was the Holy Apostle himself, *I find then a Law, that when I would do good, evil is present with me*, Rom. 7. 21. *and* v. 23. *I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin*, and this was that which broke his spiritual peace, and filled his soul with trouble and complaints, as you see, v. 24 *O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from this body of death?*

Gal. 5. 17.

Rom. 7. 21.

So that it is sin that interrupts the peace of *Gods people*; indwelling lust stirring and breaking forth, must needs cause trouble and grief in the soul of a Believer; for it is as natural for sin to bring forth trouble, as it is for *grace* to bring forth *peace*; every sin contracts a new guilt upon the Soul, and guilt provokes *God*; and where there is a sense of guilt contracted, and *God* provoked, there can be no peace, no quiet in that soul, till Faith procures fresh sprinklings of the Blood of Jesus Christ upon the Conscience.

2. *Another spring of the Believers trouble and disconsolateness of spirit, is the desertions of God*; and this follows upon the *former*; *God* doth sometimes disappear, and hide himself from his people, *Verily thou art a God that hidest thy self*, Isa. 45. 15. But the cause of *Gods* hiding,

Psal. 13. 1.

ding, is the Believers sinning: *Your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you*, Isa. 59. 2. In Heaven where there is no sinning, there is no losing the light of Gods countenance for a moment; and if Saints here could serve God without corruption, they should enjoy God without *desertion*; but this *cannot* be; while we are in this state, remaining lusts will stir and break forth, and then *God* will hide his Face; and this must needs be trouble: *Thou didst hide thy face, and I was troubled*, Psal. 30. 7.

The light of Gods countenance shining upon the Soul, is the Christians Heaven on this side Heaven; and therefore it is no wonder if the hiding of his Face be looked upon by the Soul, as one of the days of Hell; so it was by *David*, *the sorrows of Death compassed me, the pains of Hell got hold upon me, I found trouble and sorrow.* Psal. 116. 3.

3. *A third spring of that trouble and complaint that brims the banks of the Christians Spirit, is the temptations of Satan*, ὁ ἐχθρὸς, he is the great Enemy of Saints, and he envieth the quiet and comfort that their Hearts are filled with, when his Conscience is brimmed with horror and terror; and therefore though he knows he cannot destroy their peace, yet he labours to disturb their peace. As the blessed Spirit of God is first a Sanctifier, and then a Comforter, working grace in order to peace; so this cursed Spirit of Hell is first a *Tempter*, and then a *Troubler*; first perswading to act sin, and then accusing for sin; and this is his constant practice upon the Spirits of Gods people; he cannot endure that they should live in the light of Gods countenance, when himself is *doom'd* to Eternal, intolerable darkness. Mat. 13. 39.

And

And thus you see whence it is that the people of God are often under trouble and complaint; all arises from these three springs of

Sin within,
Desertions } without.
Temptations }

If the Saints could serve God without sinning, and enjoy God without withdrawing, and resist Satan without yielding, they might enjoy peace and comfort without sorrowing; this must be endeavoured constantly here, but it will never be attained fully, but in heaven.

But yet so far as grace is the prevailing principle in the heart, and so far as the power of Godliness is exercised in the life, so far the condition of a Child of God is a condition of peace; for it is an undoubted truth, *that the fruit of Righteousness shall be Peace*: But suppose the people of God experience little of this comfort in this life; yet,

2. *They find it in the day of Death*; Grace and Holiness will minister unto us then, and that ministration will be peace; a Believer hath a twofold spring of comfort, each one emptying it self into his Soul in a dying season; one is from above him, the other is from within him: the spring that runs comfort from above him, is the *blood of Christ sprinkled upon the Conscience*; the spring that runs comfort from within him, is the *sincerity of his heart in Gods service*, when we lie upon a death-bed, and can reflect upon our Principles and Performances in the service of God, and there find uprightness and sincerity of Heart running through all, this must needs be comfort; it was so to *Hezekiah*, *Remember*,

O Lord, how I have walked before thee in truth, and with a perfect Heart, and have done that which is good in thy ſight, Iſa. 38. 3.

Nothing maketh a Death-bed ſo uneaſie and hard as a life ſpent in the ſervice of ſin and luſt; Nothing makes a Death-bed ſo ſoft and ſweet as a life ſpent in the ſervice of God and Chriſt. Or put the caſe the people of God ſhould not meet with this comfort then; yet,

3. *They ſhall be ſure to find it after death*; if *time* bring none of this fruit to ripeneſs, why yet eternity ſhall; *grace in time will be glory in eternity*, holineſs *now* will be happineſs *then*, *whatever it is a man ſoweth in* this world, *that he ſhall be ſure to reap in the* next world: *He that ſoweth to the fleſh, ſhall of the fleſh reap corruption; but he that ſoweth to the Spirit, ſhall of the Spirit reap life everlaſting.* When ſin ſhall end in ſorrow and miſery, holineſs ſhall end in joy and glory; *Well done, thou good and faithful Servant, enter thou into the joy of thy Lord*, Mat. 25. 23. Whoever ſhareth in the *grace of Chriſt*, and conformeth to the life of Chriſt in this World, ſhall ſhare in the joys of Chriſt in the World to come, and that joy is *joy unſpeakable, and full of glory*; lo, here is the fruit of Godlineſs; ſay now, if there be not enough in Religion, whether we reſpect profit or comfort, to engage us to be *Chriſtians throughout.*

Gal. 5. 7. Gal. 6 8. Rom. 6. 23. 1 Pet. 1. 8.

4. *What an intire reſignation wicked men make of themſelves to their Luſts! and ſhall not we do ſo to the Lord Chriſt? they give up themſelves* without reſerve to the pleaſures of ſin, and ſhall we have our reſerves in the ſervice of God? they are altogether ſinners, and ſhall not we be *altogether Saints*? they *run, and faint not* in the ſervice of their luſts, and ſhall we *faint*, and *not run* in the ſervice

Conſid 4. Exod. 21. 6.

of

Exod. 21. 6. of Christ? shall the servants of corruption have their ears bored to the door-posts of sin, in token of an intire and perpetual service, and shall we not give up our selves to the Lord Christ, to be his for ever? shall
Isa. 28. 15. others make a *Covenant with Hell and Death,*
Jer. 50. 5. and shall not we *joyn our selves to God in an everlasting Covenant that cannot be forgotten? Acrius illi ad perniciem, quàm nos ad salutem?* shall they take more pains to damn their Souls, than we do to save ours? and make more speed to a place of vengeance, than we
2 Tim. 4. 8. do to a *Crown of Righteousness.*

Which do you judge best, to be saved everlastingly, or to perish everlastingly? which do you count the best Master, God, or the Devil? Christ or your Lusts? I know you will determine it on Christs side; Oh then! when others serve their Lusts with all their hearts,
Eccles 8. 11. do *you* serve *Christ*, with all *your hearts*; *if the*
Jer. 3. 5. *hearts of the sons of men be fully set in them to do evil*, then *much* more let the hearts of the sons of God be fully set in them to do good.

Consid. 5. 5. *If ye be not altogether Christians, ye will never be able to appear with comfort before God, nor to stand in the judgment of the last and great day?* for this sad *dilemma* will silence every Hypocrite; if my *commands* were not *holy, just*, and *good*, why didst thou *own them?* if they were *holy, just*, and *good*, why didst thou not obey them? If Jesus Christ was not worth the having, why didst thou profess him? if he was, then why didst thou not cleave to him, and close with him? If my *ordinances* were not appointed to convert and save souls, why didst thou sit under them, and rest in the performance of them? Or if they were, then why didst thou not submit to the power of them? If Religion be

not

not good, why dost thou profess it? If it be *good*, why dost thou not practise it? *Friend how camest thou in hither, not having on a wedding garment?* If it was not a *wedding feast*, why didst thou come at the invitation? If it was, then why didst thou come without a *wedding garment?* Mat. 22. 12.

I would but ask an *Hypocritical Professor* of the *Gospel*, what he will answer in that day. Verily you deprive your selves of all possibility of *Apology* in the day of the righteous *Judgment* of *God*; it is said of the man that had no Wedding Garment on, that when Christ came and examined him, *he was speechless*; he that is *graceless* in a *day of grace*, will be *speechless in a day of Judgment*; professing Christ without a heart to close with Christ, *will leave our Souls inexcusable*, and make our Damnation *unavoidable* and *more intolerable*. Mat. 11. 22.

These are the Motives to enforce the duty; and oh that God would *set them home* upon your *Hearts* and *Consciences*, that you might not dare to rest a *moment longer* in a *half-work*, or in being *Christians within a little*, but that you might be *altogether Christians?*

But you will say possibly, How shall I do? what means shall I use that I may attain to a through work in my Heart, that I may be not longer almost, but altogether a Christian? Quest.

Now I shall lay down three rules of *direction*, instead of many, to further and help you in this *important duty*, and so leave this work to Gods blessing. Answ.

First, *Break off all false peace of Conscience*; this is the Devils *bond* to hold *the Soul* from seeking after *Christ*. As there is the *peace of God*, so there is the *peace of Satan*; but they Direct. 1.

are

are eaſily known, for they are as contrary as Heaven and Hell, as light and darkneſs.

The *peace of God* flows from a work of Grace in the Soul, and is the peace of a regenerate ſtate; but the *peace of Satan* is the peace of an unregenerate ſtate, it is the peace of Death; in the grave *Job* ſaith there is peace; *there the wicked ceaſe from troubling*; ſo a Soul dead in ſin is full of peace, the wicked one troubleth him not.

The peace of God in the Soul is a peace flowing from removal of guilt, by juſtifying grace, *Rom.* 5. 1. *Being juſtified by faith in his blood, we have peace with God*; but the peace of *Satan* in the Soul, ariſes, and is maintained by a ſtupidneſs of Spirit, and inſenſibleneſs of guilt upon the conſcience.

The peace of God is a peace *from ſin*, that fortifies the heart againſt it; *The peace of God that paſſeth all mens underſtanding, ſhall keep your hearts and minds through Chriſt Jeſus*, Phil. 4. 7. The more of this peace there is in the ſoul, the more is the ſoul fortified againſt ſin; but the peace of Satan is peace in ſin: *The ſtrong man armed keeps the houſe, and there is all at peace*, Luk. 11. 21. The *Saints peace* is *a peace* with *God*, but not with *ſin*? the *ſinners peace* is *a peace* with *ſin*, but not with *God*; and this is a peace better broken than kept; it is a falſe, a dangerous, an undoing peace; my brethren, *death & judgment will break all peace of conſcience* but only that which is *wrought* by *Chriſt* in the *ſoul*, and is the *fruit* of the *blood* of *ſprinkling*; *when he gives quietneſs, who can make trouble?* Job 34. 29. *Now that peace that death will break*, why ſhould you keep? who would be *fond* of that *quietneſs* which the flames of Hell will burn in ſunder? and yet how many travel to hell through the fools Paradiſe of a falſe peace!

Oh break off this peace! for we can have no peace with God in Chriſt, whilſt this *peace* remains in our hearts; *Intus exiſtens prohibet alienum.* The *Lord Chriſt gives no peace* to them that will not ſeek it; and that man will never ſeek it, that does not ſee his need of it; and he that is at peace in his luſts, ſees no need of the *peace of Chriſt.* The *ſinner* muſt be *wounded for ſin*, and *troubled under it*, before Chriſt will *heal his wounds*, and give him peace from it.

2. *Labour after a through work of conviction*, every *conviction* will not do it: the *almoſt Chriſtian* hath his *conviction* as well as the *true Chriſtian*, or elſe he had never gone ſo far; but they are not ſound and right *convictions*, or elſe he had gone farther; God will have the *Soul* truly ſenſible of the *bitterneſs of ſin*, before it ſhall taſte the *ſweetneſs of mercy.* The plow of conviction muſt go deep, and make deep furrows in the heart, before God will ſow the precious ſeed of Grace and Comfort there, that ſo it may have depth of earth to grow in. This is the conſtant method of God, Firſt to ſhew man his ſin, then his Saviour: Firſt his danger, then his Redeemer: Firſt, his wound, then his cure: Firſt his own vileneſs, then Chriſts Righteouſneſs. We muſt be brought to cry out, *Unclean, unclean, to mourn for him whom we have pierced*, and then he ſets open for us a *fountain to waſh in for ſin, and for uncleanneſs*, Zach. 12. four laſt verſes compared with *Zach.* 13. 1. That is a notable place, *Job* 33. 27, 28. *He looked upon men, and if any ſay, I have ſinned and perverted that which was right, and it profited me not, He will deliver his Soul from going into the Pit, and his life ſhall ſee the light.* The ſinner muſt ſee the unprofitableneſs of his unrighteouſneſs, before he profits by Chriſts righteouſneſs. Direct. 2.

The

Numb. 21. 6, 8. The *Israelites* are first stung with the fiery Serpents, and then the brazen Serpent is set up. *Ephraim* is first throughly convinced, and then Gods Bowels of mercy work towards him. Thus it was with *Paul*, *Manasseh*, the *Jaylor*, &c. So that this is the *unchangeable* method of God in working grace, to begin with conviction of sin.

Oh therefore *labour* for *through conviction*; and there are three things we should especially be convinced of.

First, *Be convinced of the evil of sin*, the filthy and heinous nature of it; this is the greatest evil in the World; it wrongs God, it wounds Christ, it grieves the Holy Spirit, it ruineth a precious Soul; all other evils are not to be named with this. My Brethren, though to do sin is the worst work, yet to see sin is the best sight; for sin discovered in its vileness, makes Christ to be desired in his fulness.

But above all, labour to be convinced of the mischief of an unsound Heart; what an abhorring it is to God, what certain ruine it brings upon the Soul. Oh think often upon the Hypocrites Hell, *Mat.* 14. 15.

Secondly, *Be convinced of the misery and desperate danger of a natural condition*; for till we see the plague of our Hearts, and the misery of our state by nature, we shall never be brought off our selves to seek help in another.

Thirdly, *Be convinced of the utter insufficiency and inability of any thing below Christ Jesus to minister relief to thy Soul in this case*: All things besides Jesus Christ are *Physicians of* Job 13 4. *no value*; duties performances prayers, tears, self-righteousness, avail nothing in this case; Job 6. 19, 20 they make us, like the Troops of *Tema*, to return *ashamed at our disappointment* from such *failing Brooks*.

Alas!

Alas! It is an infinite righteousness that must satisfie for us, for it is an infinite God that is offended by us. If ever thy sin be pardoned, it is infinite mercy that must pardon it; if ever thou be reconciled to God, it is infinite merit must do it; if ever thy heart be changed, and thy state renewed, it is infinite power must effect it; and if ever thy Soul escape Hell, and be saved at last, it is *infinite Grace* must save it.

In these three things right and sound *Conviction* lyeth; and where-ever the Spirit of God worketh these through Convictions, it is in order to a true and sound Conversion. for by this means the Soul is brought under a right qualification for the receiving of Christ.

You must know that a sinner, *quatenus* a sinner, can never come to Christ: For he is dead in sin, in enmity against Christ, an Enemy to God, and the Grace of God; but there are certain qualifications that come between the Souls dead state in sin, and the work of Conversion and closing with Christ, whereby the Soul is put into a capacity of receiving the Lord Jesus Christ: For no Man is brought immediately out of his dead state, and made to believe in Jesus Christ; there are *termini mediantes*, some qualifications coming in between; now sound Convictions are the right qualifications for the sinners receiving Christ; *for he came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance*; that is, such as see themselves sinners, and thereby in a lost condition; so *Luke* examples it, *The Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost; he is anointed, and sent to bind up the broken-hearted, to comfort all that mourn.* *See* Norton's *Orth. Evangel.* p. 130. Mat. 9 12, 13. Luke 9 10. Isa. 61. 1, 2.

Oh therefore, if you would be sound Christians, get sound Convictions; ask those that are

are believers indeed, and they will tell you had it not been for their Convictions, they had never sought after Christ for sanctification and salvation; they will tell you they had perished, if they had not perished; they had been in *eternal bondage*, but for their *spiritual bondage*: had they not been lost as to themselves, they had been utterly lost as to Christ.

Periissem nisi perfiem.

Direct. 3. 3. *Never rest in Convictions till they end in Conversion*; this is that wherein most men miscarry, they rest in their Convictions, and take them for Conversion, as if sin seen were therefore forgiven, or as if a sight of the want of Grace, were the truth of the work of Grace.

That is a notable place in *Hos.* 13. 13. *Ephraim is an unwise Son, for he should not stay long in the place of the breaking forth of Children.* The place of the breaking forth of Children is the Womb; as the Child comes out of the Womb, so is Conversion born out of the Womb of Conviction; now when the Child sticks between the Womb and the World, it is dangerous, it hazards the life both of Mother and Child; so when a Sinner rests in Conviction, and goes no farther, but sticks *in the place of the breaking forth of Children*; this is very dangerous, and hazards the life of the Soul.

You that are at any time under *Convictions*, oh take heed of resting in them, do not stay long in the place of the breaking forth of Children; though it is true, that Conviction is the first step to Conversion, yet it is not Conversion; a man may carry his Convictions along with him into Hell.

What is that which troubleth poor creatures when they come to die, but this, I have not improved my Convictions? at such a time I was convinced of sin, but yet I went on

on in ſin in the face of my Convictions; in ſuch a Sermon I was convinced of ſuch a duty, but I ſlighted the Conviction; I was convinced of my want of Chriſt, and of the readineſs of Chriſt to pardon and ſave, but alas I followed not the Conviction.

My *Brethren*, remember this, *ſlighted Convictions* are the worſt death bed companions. There are two things eſpecially which above all others make a death-bed very uncomfortable.

1. *Purpoſes and Premiſes not performed.*
2. *Convictions ſlighted, and not improved.*

When a man takes up purpoſes to cloſe with Chriſt, and yet puts them not in execution; and when he is convinced of ſin and duty, and yet improves not his Convictions; oh this will ſting and wound at laſt.

Now therefore, hath the Spirit of the Lord been at work in your Souls? have you ever been convinced of the evil of ſin, of the miſery of a natural ſtate, of the inſufficiency of all things under Heaven to help, of the fulneſs and righteouſneſs of Jeſus Chriſt, of the neceſſity of reſting upon him for pardon and peace, for ſanctification and ſalvation? Have you ever been really convinced of theſe things? oh then as you love your own Souls, as ever you hope to be ſaved at laſt, and enjoy God for ever, improve theſe Convictions, and be ſure you reſt not in them till they riſe up to a through cloſe with the Lord Jeſus Chriſt, and ſo end in a ſound and perfect converſion. Thus ſhall you be not only *almoſt*, but *altogether a Chriſtian.*

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